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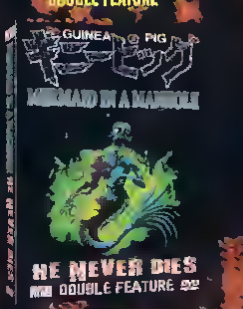


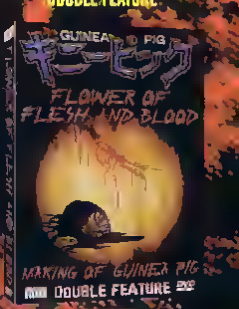
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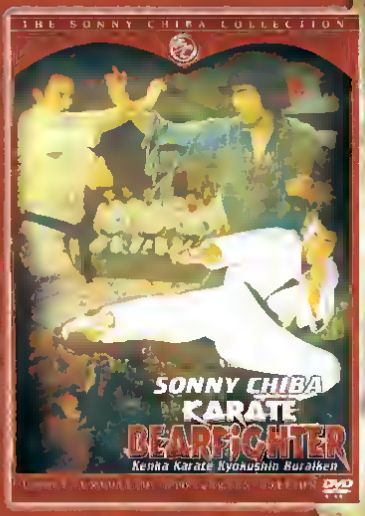
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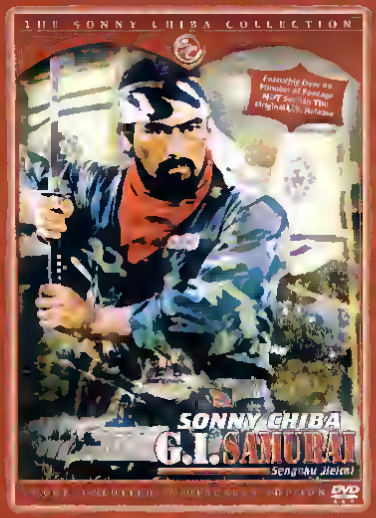
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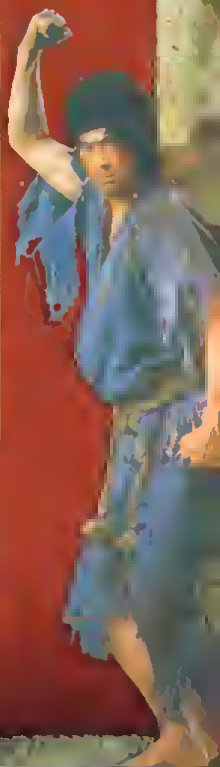
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How To Make a MAGAZINE



Well, here it is, the first three issues of *Rue Morgue* reprinted – warts and all – for your perusal and, hopefully enjoyment. I edited and laid the first issue out in the Fall of 1997, spent $1,000 dollars I didn't have on manufacturing it and then distributed it for free in the streets of Toronto a few days before Halloween. The thinking at the time was that people would pick up a zine they'd never seen if they didn't have to pay for it and, of course it worked because people always grab what's free.

I probably didn't need to offer another issue for free, considering I couldn't really afford it, but I did anyway and nearly went broke. The issue disappeared in days and I started getting letters. At that time, my office was the living room of my tiny bachelor apartment, and it became hugely cluttered overnight.

But people were reading the mag. Before the second issue was out, I received a telephone call from Anchor Bay head Jay Douglas, who told me in no uncertain terms that *Rue Morgue* was the most impressive indie publication to cross his desk. When issue #2 came out and we had unpleasant words to say about Anchor Bay's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* reissues, I didn't hear from Jay for a long, long time, despite the fact that he had wanted me to write the liner notes for Anchor Bay's reissue of Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre*. No hard feelings, mind you, but I guess there was no shortage of audacity early on.

Anyway, one day I also received a fateful phone call from someone at Alliance Atlantis, who booked the back cover of issue #3 and allowed colour to be brought into *Rue Morgue*'s pages. Reaction was mixed; some people dug the stark black and white feel and didn't want the change, others remarked at how professional the new issue looked.



Like issues #1 and #2, issue #3 was laid out on a PC 386 with Quark Xpress (vers. 3.1) and anyone who knows anything about computers and/or layout knows that those issues were labours of love, because only love can explain why anyone would come home from work every day to agonize over an ancient computer that slowly twitched a magazine to completion.

Although I had six years of experience in publishing prior to *Rue Morgue*, it wasn't until this time that I realized exactly how much work actually went into putting a magazine together. The creative overload was huge: aside from coming up with, assigning, editing and writing articles, I also needed determine font styles, photos and artwork, headlines and cutlines and original names for all of the departments. There was also, of course, the thing of coming up with a title for the magazine that I could live with.

I chose the name *Rue Morgue* because it neatly characterized the magazine's content and also described a place – for some reason the idea of a place spoke strongly to me (a dream that finally materialized last month, see page 25). And although the actual street is in Paris, I felt the name was uniquely Canadian in that it was a composite of a French and an English word. But also Rue Morgue worked well into the concept of the magazine – Edgar Allan Poe's story The Murders In The Rue Morgue was a detective story and fit into my idea of a magazine that looked past the surface of horror entertainment and into its history and culture. Nevertheless, looking back at these issues, I can only see the crudities, the errors, the independent constraints. So I hope you will be kind to me as you read them.

The *Rue Morgue* you see today is the result of the efforts of a lot of people but the fact that it bears such a striking resemblance to these early issues is a testament to a strong editorial commitment. Even so, I'm not sure if I'll ever do another reprint – it's like publicly reliving every awkward moment of your teenage years.

People always ask me whether I ever thought *Rue Morgue* would get to where it is now. Honestly, I never thought about it, I was too busy doing it.

Rod Gudino
Editor-In-Chief
Rue Morgue H.Q.

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE 2926 Dundas Street West, Toronto ON M6P 1Y8 – CANADA PH: 416-651-9675 FX: 416-651-6055
Web: www.rue-morgue.com E-mail: info@rue-morgue.com RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE Special Collector's Edition ISSN 1481 – 1103 Agreement No. 40033764
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HORROR IN CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT
Oct. 1997 #1

RUE MORGUE
MAGAZINE



PREMIERE ISSUE

LEX GIGEROFF
Extends The Boundaries of Mainstream Television with LEXX: The Dark Zone Stories

SWAMP THING
The Evolution of Horror in Comics

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October 1997



Note From Underground

Premiere Issue

A question that ignites a blaze... If memory serves correctly, the question was initially posed by my brother, then echoed shortly afterwards by my family and even by some of my friends. It was the result of having embarked on a personal project to methodically view one hundred horror films produced between 1950 and 1980. The project was to be the springboard for a series of discussions and exchanges, many of which you will see played out in the pages of the magazine you are currently holding in your hands.

But at the time there was only a question, a simple and obvious enough question, which, I admit, I had considered before but never really *asked*.

"Why do you like horror so much?"

In the most realistic sense possible, that question is the single most important factor to the wholesale work that produced *Rue Morgue Magazine* shortly a year after it was posed. But I'm going to leave that aside for the moment in favour of backtracking a little bit. The first question — the first real question of course — is, what is horror in the first place?

The origins of horror in art are tied with the origins of art itself, simply because art is devoted to the expression of the human experience, and fear, like it or not, ranks among the most basic of human experiences. But horror isn't art, at least not exclusively art. Horror is also an experience, probably one of the most unpleasant experiences if not the extreme instance of unpleasantness, the language of horror is fear, pain, loneliness, revulsion, insanity. But unlike the experience of horror, the art of horror is pleasurable even if its subject matter is precisely the experience of the unpleasant, sometimes in the extreme. This paradox is at the heart of any aesthetic dealing with horror, and precisely how we make a distinction between that which is horror art and that which is not.

Perhaps this is why the history of horror in art is long and extremely variegated. It spans ancient Biblical myth and modern Stephen King paperbacks and includes an endless list of playwrights, poets, philosophers, musicians, filmmakers, and artists in between. Their motivations have been as varied as their imaginations; sometimes to thrill or disgust, sometimes to test the boundaries of what we consider to be beautiful, sometimes to wrestle with the spectre of existential unease.

The twentieth century in the west is especially important because it has developed a singular interest in the horrific and all but elevated it to the level of zeitgeist. Whether because of the continued effects of the philosophy of *Existenz* or a bad case of pre-millennial anxiety, from Richard Wagner to the X-Files, horror has been a distinguishing feature in the art that this century has produced.

I suppose, if you read between the lines, you might think that I am geering up for a sociological answer to my question. I am not. The proper answer, proper for now, remains the same as one year ago. Why do I like horror? I don't know. If you think it's not an answer you might be right, and I can tell you it is by no means a final answer. But it is the only one that could have made the question seem so overwhelming that the possibility of exploring the theoretical basis — and market reality — of this artform became such an attractive idea. I'd like you to see our debut issue as we at *Rue Morgue* see it, as the first step towards getting to an answer or set of answers, through the discussion, elucidation and celebration of horror in art. **-RG**

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE

HORROR CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

199 Avenue Road, Suite 534
Toronto ON
M5R 2J3
Phone: 416-964-6657
morgue@istar.ca
http://home.istar.ca/~morgue

Publisher & Editor
ROD GUDINO

Associate Editor
MARY-BETH HOLLYER

Contributors
EMMA ANDERSON
GARY BUTLER
PEDRO CABEZUELO
AMOS CARLEN
ISABELLE GOWDIE
JAMES PERRETTA

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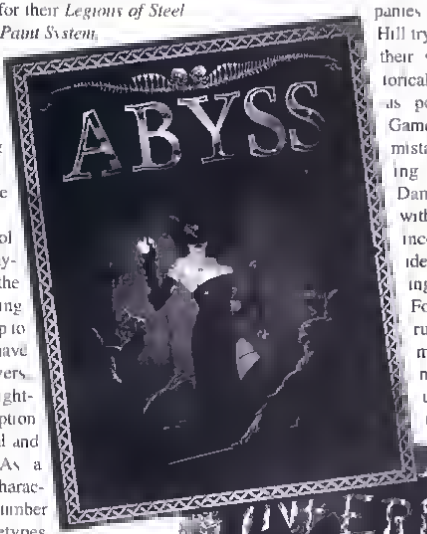
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Pure hell for Dante's Hell

New games based on Dante's Inferno make for problematic role and board playing

games by Amos Carlen

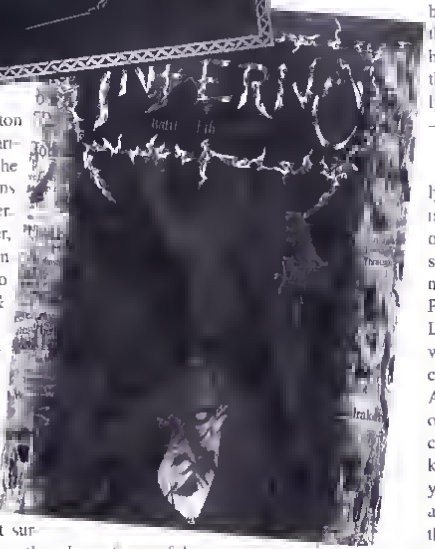
In the wake of a whole slew of horror-related games (most notably those from White Wolf, such as *Vampire*, *Werewolf* and *Wraith*), it is becoming glaringly apparent that there is something of a strong interest in the genre. Canada-based Global Games, best known for their *Legions of Steel* and *The Color Drop Paint System*, has just released *Abyss*, their attempt to meet some of the new demand for horror role-playing games on the market. So how does the game meet up?



Set in the world of Dante's *Inferno*, players of *Abyss* take on the roles of low ranking "fiends" who stand up to fifteen feet tall and have many special powers, such as magic, heightened sensory perception or incredible physical and mental attributes. As a fiend or Sergeant, characters can be one of a number of different archetypes such as an Elf, Minotaur, Succubus, Pluton Dwarf or Centaur. Players are sent on various campaigns and missions where the goal is to try and impress your patrons while increasing your own power. Eventually, as you gain enough power, you can become an Archfiend who can grow to over sixty feet in height. So *Abyss* is kind of like *Dungeons & Dragons* in hell. But is it fun?

In actuality, the playing experience is not that far removed from *D&D*. Not far removed enough -- by a longshot. Perhaps the biggest difference is that instead of using a number of different dice, the only kind of die you need is the six-sided variety and lots of them (you might find yourself having to roll as many as twenty-five at a time). Not surprisingly, one of my biggest problems with this game is the amount of time one has to spend rolling for things — especially with combats that tend to drag on for lengthy periods of time.

The idea is novel and the rule book looks great, but I found that *Abyss* came up short in terms of giving me a real alternate role-playing experience. Whereas other gaming companies such as Avalon Hill try to be as true to their settings — historical or otherwise — as possible, Global Games makes the mistake of borrowing heavily from Dante's *Inferno* without really incorporating its ideas into the gaming experience. For example, the rule book does mention *Inferno*'s notion of perpetual torment (such as the damnations of having to swim in laeces or undergoing elaborate disembowelment) but the idea finds no real correspondence in the game.



If you don't have much experience with role-playing games, I suppose *Abyss* is as good an introduction as any, but you may as well begin with the tried and tested (and much better) *Dungeons & Dragons* or anything in the White Wolf line. For anyone who does have experience with these kinds of games, I think they will find *Abyss* ultimately unsatisfying, somewhat convoluted and absolutely — depressingly — unhorrific.

*

Inferno, also by Global Games, is essentially the board game version of *Abyss*, though it is more of a combat and strategy game instead of a role-playing one. Once again, the game is set in the milieu of Dante's *Inferno*, but connection with the work seems to end there. Players control a number of Archfiends, Lieutenants and human Hordes in combat with the option of choosing from pre-made characters (with sexy names like Malabor, Azkiel and Shamshiel) or making up their own. Presumably (because it is never made clear in the rule book), the aim is to destroy, kill and otherwise obliterate the full army of your rival players. The game sets out the situation for doing so with a handsome package that includes a bunch of nice action figure cards, a beautiful playing map and a well illustrated rule book.

ABYSS
Role Playing in Dante's Inferno
2+ players; ages 12+
$33.75

INFERNO
Battles Of The Abyss
2+ players; ages 12+
$34.95

continued on pg 17

Bringing Darkness to the The Dark Zone

An Interview with Lex Gigeroff, co-creator of LEXX: The Dark Zone Stories

BY ROD GUDINO



Photos by Bill Niven

Pushing the boundaries. Giggerota (Ellen Dubin) lashes out.

When North American audiences previewed *LEXX: The Dark Zone Stories* this summer, many of them had no idea that the bizarre science fiction horror-comedy signalled a breakthrough for programming as we know it. With production costs that tallied $1.7 million an hour (the pilot was aired in four two-hour episodes), *LEXX* was the most ambitious computer animation project in the history of television, employing an unprecedented 70% of screen time with computer generated footage. But *LEXX*'s real breakthrough was with the content of the show itself, and the wry, edgy universe it posed as an alternative to the antiseptic science fiction currently in vogue.

Behind the scenes stood producer, writer and director Paul Donovan (*Def Con 4*, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*), who secured backing and co-production from the German company Wolfram Tichy and sold the show for international syndication on a pitch that *LEXX* was a nihilist response to the utopian "self-righteousness" of *Star Trek*. Excessive, gruesome, funny, *LEXX* made its North American premiere to a lot of critical noise, some of which branded the show a "perverted blend of Judge Dredd and Battlestar Galactica" and a product of "nightmares and drug reveries."

Donovan had help, in Canada from co-writers Jeff Hirschfield and Lex Gigeroff, after whom the show's central character — a phallus shaped mechanical insect the size of Manhattan — is named. Gigeroff, who had secured some notoriety at the Atlantic Fringe Festival with a vitriolic play about Brian Mulroney's last ten days and piece about CIA experiments on "garden variety schizophrenics," conformed to Donovan's search for a writer who had a twisted vision of the world and a strong creative streak as opposed to a long resume.

The approach worked a glorious rebellion on television on the two occasions in which the show was aired, primarily because *LEXX* violated almost every science fiction convention extant, trading in traditional concerns with technology, exploration and socio-political commentary for a bizarre blend of humour, sex, and gross eccentricity. Gigeroff, to whom is owed much of *LEXX*'s critical mesh of elements ominous and silly, also provides the physical body of His Shadow, the show's Darth Vader like ruler. He spoke to *Rue Morgue* shortly after *LEXX: The Dark Zone Stories* aired for a second time on CHUM television in September.

What kinds of ideas were you bringing into the LEXX project?

A couple of things, right off the top. *Star Trek* is dead. If the sixties ever come back then it will mean something, but right now *Star Trek* is a relic. And I'll tell you why. I find it preachy and moralistic and I find there's something very American colonial, very fascist about the Federation. The 'we are the colonizing civilizing force,' we don't want to do that. *LEXX* is anarchy, it's chaos. Secondly, we wanted a dark sense of humour in it. We all love John Carpenter's *Dark Star* because it doesn't take itself too seriously which a lot of sci-fi does. And third, we're suspicious of technology. A lot of the time we can't get toasters to work properly, and the Stealth Bomber — the most sophisticated piece of machinery ever designed — can't fly in the rain. It will defend America as long as it isn't raining. I love that. Things don't work, why do we assume that they have to work in *Star Trek* and *Deep Space Nine*?

Sci-fi television shows often take on scriptural status for a sizeable portion of their audience. The kind of universe that is usually portrayed, the universe of moral cause and effect of Star Trek *for example, versus* LEXX*'s universe of chaos can be a very important distinction. If it doesn't have that moral structure, it can really be a problem.*

I'm glad to hear you say that When you kill God, now what? Well, you either install Baby Doc to take his place or you go, 'sorry, you're on your own,' which can be equally terrifying; it's a choice of nightmares Well, we've chosen this particular nightmare which really is ultimately affirming actually My loyalties are to my wife and my kids and my friends and the people I work with and to some extent the outside — that's what my morality answers to And I think our characters do ultimately have that We put them through hoops and this and that but ultimately they are going to make the right choice But their loyalties aren't going to be to The Federation or to His Shadow or to whatever, it's going to be Zev fighting for Kai, Stan fighting for Zev, and Kai fighting for Stan and Zev To me, if you can get that in life, then you're probably ok

You wrote LEXX *specifically for television and yet, in parts it is extremely grotesque Do you think the success of* Millennium *and* X-Files *made it easier for the show to get on TV?*

Oh yes I don't know so much about *Millennium*, that came out while we were working on *LEXX* But in a general sense, has the culture gotten a little darker and are we trying to make it even darker? Yes

Why has the culture gotten darker?

My personal feeling about this is that mainstream culture has declined -- not by what's actually happening in the mainstream — but by what's happening at the edges [Fringe culture] ripples through and the centre gets bigger; and as the centre of mainstream culture gets bigger, it pushes the edges even further and then you have to go out a little further to be on the edge Stuff that was on the edge fifteen years ago is not on the edge anymore because it's gotten pulled into the mainstream Also, I think that the explosion of media accelerates that process. What usually took one hundred years now happens in eight, because there's so much of it There are so many television shows, there are a bewildering array of fictions out there

So you're saying that people are becoming more knowledgeable for the varieties of fringe society and maybe they are drifting towards it a little more or are open to it a little more?

I think that's what's happening Think of mainstream culture in the fifties; there wasn't much of a range of entertainment choices The range of subject matter and content and tone and style was very narrow, and then the sixties started to change that, and all of a sudden the word fuck appeared on the screen In a way that kind of crossed the rubicon or it crossed one type of rubicon anyway Once you've crossed that boundary then everybody does it Now where do you go? So jump forward ten years and a thing pops out of John Hurt's stomach in *Alien*, which crossed a whole other boundary in terms of mainstream, they had never seen anything like it before And now that's kind of passe Every one of those things, which seems groundbreaking and extreme at the time, expands the centre of the mainstream

Were you thinking of expanding the boundaries so to speak?

A little bit I mean, I don't think we spent a whole lot of time thinking about this We spent most times sitting around drinking and talking about the stories we were going to do and occasionally we'd get a little reflective We didn't spend a lot of time navel gazing, but there was a general feeling that we wanted to push the envelope a little bit

> "horror can actually be tremendously humanizing and civilizing if it's done properly"

Was there anything that was censored from the show?

It's funny, because much to my surprise I would say basically everything that we wanted we were able to do, but it's kind of funny the way these things work *LEXX* was a Canadian German co-production — and here's the split between North America and Europe — North America is hung up about sex big time and the reason is we are living in a vestigial Puritan culture Europe? No such compunction But no violence on the other hand, which we're pretty cavalier about over here Violence is very serious, especially for Germans When we were writing the script for The Giga Shadow episode, we had scenes with piles of bodies and viscera and blood and tendons coming off bones -- very macabre and gory And the German producers said we'd prefer it if you didn't do bloody bones with sinews on them, which to me seemed like a little bit of a niggling point, but it's actually a very interesting point

You were writing a lot of material before LEXX, *but were you especially a fan of horror?*

I always have been a huge fan, totally Mostly film, but some books as well; I think I've seen most of it I don't think I watch it as much now as I used to, simply because when you're writing the stuff and doing it all day, your capacity for watching it at night is a lot less But I think I have a pretty good grounding in the main works of literature and movies



Michael McMannus as the undead hero Kai.

What sorts of movies do you mean?

I'd say the first horror movie that really liquified my bowels was one of the remakes of *Murders In The Rue Morgue*, the one with Jason Robards I saw it when I was ten or eleven and it was the first movie I saw where I couldn't sleep that night Just thinking about it now, I'm getting goosebumps Two years ago I found it in a video store so I had to watch it again, not really very good but for an eleven year old, it was unbelievable the kind of psychological terror it instilled After that I was fucked, it was all I wanted to watch. I loved *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, I think it's actually a brilliant film, I think it's one of the most important films in the last twenty-five to fifty years It's got a genuine stench of un-artificial madness to it, you know, things have gone really wrong There are bits from that movie

continued on pg 17



Texas Chainsaw Massacre: "a genuine stench of un-artificial madness"

How SWAMP THING revolutionized the comic book

By PEDRO CABEZUELO

For many, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) redefined horror films and steered the genre down new avenues, coining the phrase "psychological horror" along the way. While offering a number of grisly murders, few can argue that the horrific core of the film has less to do with blood than it does with the human mind. It is the twisted relationship between "nice guy" Norman Bates and his "mother" which remains with the audience long after Janet Leigh's wet screams fade from the mind.

The silver screen's distant cousin, the comic book, is also no stranger to this facet of horror. However, it took considerably longer for the comic world to fully begin exploring the world beyond conventional horror. When writer Alan Moore took over DC Comics' *Swamp Thing* in late 1983, few would have guessed that over the next four years Moore would redefine horror for comics much in the same way that Hitchcock had done for the motion picture industry some twenty-three years earlier.

Our story actually begins back in 1972 with the publication of DC's *House of Secrets* #92. This particular issue of the popular horror anthology featured a short eight-page story entitled "Swamp Thing" written by Len Wein and drawn by artist extraordinaire Berni Wrightson.

Less a monster and more a tragic figure, "Swampy" proved popular enough for DC to spin him off into his own series later in the year, albeit with some major changes to the character's origin. Botanist Alec Holland and wife Linda are working on a top-secret "bio-restorative formula" (it makes plants grow really big) for the government. Stashed away in the Louisiana bayou, the experiment is nevertheless sabotaged by some token bad men. A bomb is planted in Holland's lab and when it explodes, it douses him with the formula and sends his burning body running into the swamp. When he emerges as the eponymous monstrosity, he finds his wife dead and his humanity missing, with nothing left in his life but to wander the world hoping to reclaim it.

Containing a high dosage of melodrama and grade school irony (the creature proves to be more "human" than many of the people he encounters), the first ten issues of the series, the only ones drawn by Wrightson and the only ones considered to be worth reading, nonetheless contain some very familiar horror icons. Readers were treated to wolfmen, bats, decaying castles, aliens, mad scientists, walk-



IT CAME FROM THE BAYOU!

ing dead, and even angry hordes of villagers carrying pitchforks and torches. While by today's standards these stories are fairly tame and rather simplistic, to comic readers of the early 70s they were a veritable terror treasure trove.

To understand this mentality we must shift back even earlier to the 1950s and an America recovering from the Second World War. With the foreign threat vanquished, America turned its attention inward and decided to deal with the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. A number of Senators came to the conclusion that comic books were behind this disturbing trend and in April of 1954 a number of hearings were held to deal with the issue.

Star witness for the prosecution was a book entitled *The Seduction of the Innocent* written by psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham. Published that year, the book dealt with the psychological damage that comics were reaping on the nation's youngsters. Aside from the detrimental effects of crime and horror comics, Wertham also attacked the "latent homoeroticism" in *Batman* and *Wonder Woman*. Although the hearings lasted only three days, their effects were catastrophic to the comics industry and managed to put more than one comic company out of business for "polluting the minds of youngsters."

To ward off crusaders, and to stay in business, DC and several other companies committed themselves to a code of ethics monitored by the Comics Code Authority. If you look closely on the cover of some newsstand comics today, you may see a tiny stamp of approval from the CCA. Nowadays this is little more than a curio harkening back to "purer" times, but in the 50s/60s the seal was all but mandatory.

Not surprisingly, some of the books hardest hit were horror titles (Bill Gaine's EC comics -- publishers of *Tales From The Crypt* -- were completely banned by 1956). This probably had something to do with the fact that one of the stipulations of the CCA was that comics were prohibited from depicting werewolves, vampires, mummies, etc. Consequently, most of the stories published in horror titles such as *House of Mystery* or *House of Secrets* had less shock value than the recent animated *Tales From The Crypt Keeper*, and were, in a word, inane.

However, by the early 70s the CCA had started to loosen up a bit, and publishers began to take advantage of their leniency. Which is a long-winded way of saying that the stories in *Swamp Thing*, while stale today, were fresh and even revolutionary back then.

The novelty soon wore off, however, and it wasn't long before readers and writers began to get bored with their newfound hive of horror. By the time *Swamp Thing* reached its twenty-fourth issue, the series had become a strange and unsatisfying sci-fi/horror hybrid. The series was promptly cancelled.

Swampy made a number of appearances throughout the DC universe in the late 70s, still searching for a way to regain his human body, but it wasn't until horrormeister Wes Craven entered the scene in the early 80s that things began to take seed. While Craven's 1982 *Swamp Thing* movie was hardly a masterpiece, it did lead DC to start a new series for everyone's favourite muck man.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing debuted to coincide with the movie and returned Swampy to his horror roots. As written by Martin Pasko, the tales were enjoyable and a vast improvement over the tail-end of the previous run, but not enough to fire up fandom. Into its second year, *Swamp Thing* faced cancellation again.

Then came Alan Moore.

Moore was an up and coming British comics writer who had worked on the popular *2000 AD*, *Doctor Who Magazine*, and the highly acclaimed *Marvelman* (renamed *Miracleman* in North America). His hard-hitting storytelling, as well as his mastery of comic book dialogue, had earned him a not undeserved reputation for high quality work. He took over *Swamp Thing* with issue number 20. By issue 21 Moore had completely redefined the character and the direction of the book.

Moore's major revelation was that the Swamp Thing was not in fact Alec Holland. Apparently, Holland himself had died when he fell into the swamp and, in essence, his "consciousness" had been absorbed by the plants in the swamp and -- in conjunction with the growth formula -- was used as a template from which the surrounding plant life formed a distorted human body believing itself to be Alec Holland.

While this sounded completely ludicrous, and no doubt blasphemous to some *Swamp Thing* purists, Moore's presentation and writing made it not only plausible but truly shocking. What was once the horror of a deformed beast striving for humanity was replaced by the horror of something which had never been human but thought itself to be, and its realization that it could never attain its dream. Despite this set back, Swamp Thing eventually came to terms with this revelation and was ready for the next challenge Moore had to throw at him.

Issue 29 still stands as one of the eeriest and most disturbing comics ever printed. The story opens with the naked body of longtime Swamp Thing friend Abigail Arcane lying on a kitchen floor. Abby, bleeding and hysterical,

"For some twenty years now, comic book enthusiasts have maintained the jolly tradition of handing out colorful nicknames to artists and writers. Stan Lee is "The Man," Jack Kirby is "The King," Gil Kane was once "Sugar-Lips," though I think he'd prefer us all to forget that. Jim Shooter has been called, oh gosh, all *sorts* of things. But Alan Moore, the British writer of Swamp Thing, Miracleman, Watchmen and much else, has, on more than one occasion, received the most striking sobriquet of all. God Incarnate."

-From the Introduction to the Critics Choice Files Magazine Spotlight on *Swamp Thing*

> "...editor Karen Berger decided to go for broke and defend Moore's decision to explore new and risky territory."

thinks back to what led to this moment the sudden change in her husband Matt to make amends for their failed marriage his creepy new friends, and a pervading smell which she can't place When Abby realizes the smell (strongly implied to be semen) is coming from within her, the reader is treated to a horrific scene of her tearing her clothes and burning them, trying to wash the smell out, to the point where she uses an abrasive sponge to scrape her skin off

At this point it is revealed that Abby's husband has been possessed by her uncle, Swamp Thing's arch enemy Dr Anton Arcane a crazy occult scientist introduced back in the first series who covets Swamp Thing's body and who has a frustrating habit of coming back from the dead The final scene where Abby is surrounded and attacked by her husband/uncle and his friends (in truth, rotting corpses animated by insects) demonstrates the potential for horror the comic book page can attain, bringing images of rape to the fore The true horror of the issue lies not with the return of Arcane, or the walking corpses, or the recurring insect imagery (all evocatively and moodily rendered by artists Steve Bissette and John Totleben) Rather it is the undercurrent of incest, venereal disease, and sexual assault which runs throughout the story

It is for this reason that the CCA stamp did not appear on the cover of this issue Although some titles during the 70s had certain issues rejected by the Code (primarily because those issues dealt with the topic of drug abuse), *Swamp Thing* 29 marked the first time a mainstream comic was not approved due to horror content and sexual undertones While there was little fanfare at the time, this proved to be the first step towards making comics more appealing to adult audiences



Turning point Issue 29

By this time DC was becoming aware of the growing popularity of *Swamp Thing*, particularly among the older crowd Rather than sacrifice story quality and the handling of adult themes simply to make the product more "suitable" for younger audiences, editor Karen Berger decided to go for broke and defend Moore's decision to explore new and risky territory This was not only a major event for horror comics, but for comics in general Finally a major company not only acknowledged that an older audience existed, but realized they could capitalize on it as well The seal reappeared again in the next issue, but with #31 it disappeared off the *Swamp Thing*'s cover for good

Realizing that they were no longer bound by the CCA and that the title had begun to garner a sizeable adult following, DC supported Moore and capitalized on this turn of events by labelling the comic "Sophisticated Suspense"

In the meantime (as things developed) Moore had made a deliberate attempt to steer away from conventional horror imagery during his first year, feeling there was no longer any place for vampires or mummies in comic books However, by his second year he was feeling confident enough that he could make such horror mainstays work Issue 37 not only began a fourteen issue odyssey referred to as the "American Gothic", but also introduced an enigmatic British occultist and Sting lookalike John Constantine, who recruits Swampy for the ultimate battle between good and evil

What followed over the next year was a veritable horror feast complete with vampires, haunted houses, serial killers, werewolves, voodoo tribes, and one of the most disturbing of Moore's creations, an Invunche, a creature which has its head twisted backwards and his arm sown into his spine at birth

However, like issue 29 before it, it's the subtext to these stories that prove most disturbing For example, Moore uses the curse of the werewolf in issue 40 as a metaphor for the "curse" of menstruation and the prejudices women face in society Similarly, his storyline involving zombies and voodoo was a thinly veiled commentary on racism

With the American Gothic saga over, Moore decided to try his hand at science fiction, and the following year saw Swampy launched into outer space, struggling to find his way back home. While definitely less horrific than his previous stories, Moore returned to themes such as rape, isolation, and masturbation

These stories, combined with the reputation



Sophisticated Suspense A sample of Moore's American Gothic.



***Swamp Thing* grows up: the comic as it appeared in 1976, 1982, 1984 and 1994.**

that *Swamp Thing* had begun to garner in comic circles as an "adult title", led DC to begin labelling the title "For Mature Readers" with issue 57.

Within the year DC came out with a number of "adult" titles, many dealing with horror. The most successful of these was *Hellblazer*, which documented the further adventures of everyone's favourite trench coat-wearing, fag-smoking occult Brit, John Constantine. With more of an emphasis on gore, Judeo-Christian mythology, and social/political satire, *Hellblazer* took a different path from its moss-covered friend but further cemented a place for sophisticated horror in the comics world. *Hellblazer*'s success, in turn, helped to spawn other horror titles such as *Sandman* and *Books of Magic* and led to the eventual creation of Vertigo, a DC imprint which currently publishes books aimed exclusively at the adult market, with a strong emphasis on horror and the bizarre. That was 1987, the comics industry was still experiencing a cultural renaissance and it was an exciting time for creators and readers. Fans were treated to a number of mature and *well-written* stories. Adults were no longer ashamed to read comics on the subway.

However, the industry's recognition of the adult market would also lead to mainstream companies losing much of their talent. In order to placate parent groups who felt that some comics were unsuitable for children, publishers such as DC made sure the "suggested for mature readers" label appeared on their adult books. A number of writers, including Moore, did not approve of big publishers placing labels on their titles and, in essence, restricting their work to a certain age group. Although they certainly had more freedom than ever before, many still felt bound by the corporate mentality.

With the sudden growth in the industry, and higher creative recognition, many writers and artists felt that their name alone was enough to sell comics and they left the bigger companies for smaller independents or to start their own, thereby gaining more creative control.

Alan Moore concluded his run on the *Swamp Thing* with issue 64. No huge battles were fought, no major revelations. Rather, the reader was presented to a peaceful tale of Swamp Thing retreating into the swamp with now-lover Abby Moore bowed out as quietly as he arrived.

And just as there are those who can view *Psycho* today and remain unimpressed, so too, undoubtedly, are there those amongst today's "sophisticated" comic readers who can read Moore's *Swamp Thing* and fail to gather their importance. It has been a while since Swampy led the way in horror. Indeed, by the time *Swamp Thing* was once again cancelled with issue 171 in 1996 — this time due to a lack of new ideas rather than to low sales — Swamp Thing had become an omnipotent god like environmental figure with the occasional horror element. But for a number of years *Swamp Thing* was a trend setter and Moore's issues remain as a bible of sorts, demonstrating not only the potential for horror in comics, but the actual potential of the comic book genre.

Pedro Cabezuelo is a freelance writer whose passions include comic books, science fiction and movies, movies, movies. He currently lives in Toronto with one budgie and several Star Wars action figures.



Adrienne Barbeau and Dick Durock in Wes Craven's *Swamp Thing*. The movie encouraged DC to revive the series.

CINEMACABRE

Lynch's *Highway* Runs Over Familiar Themes

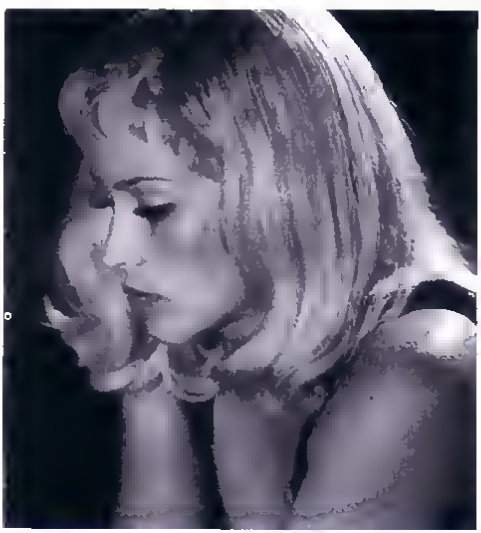
Lost Highway
Starring Bill Pullman and Patricia Arquette
Directed by David Lynch
Written by David Lynch and Barry Gifford

In twenty years since *Eraserhead*, David Lynch has garnered a name for himself as a visionary, if not revolutionary, American film maker with a penchant for the darkly bizarre. His forays into humour (see especially *Wild At Heart*) are only overrun by his obvious interests in the subjects of mystery, eroticism and the macabre. Of course, in the universe of David Lynch's films, all of these elements are more often than not synonymous with one another. *Lost Highway* was no exception to this conceptual outlook, in fact, the film quickly showed itself to be among the strongest advocators of the view, facilitating its task by reverting to Lynch's early period preference for lush cinematic style over narrative logic.

Spotlit with a sultry soft red hue that recalls the similar use of *Eraserhead*'s drab green of despair, *Lost Highway* focuses on the oppressively quiet domestic life of Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) and his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette). They are, to put it mildly, an oddly solemn couple with a million unspoken secrets between them. Fred hears a sinister message over the intercom, meets a stranger at a party who has the ability to be in two places at the same time and has nightmares about his wife standing at the bedside wearing a black shroud and a hideously altered face. When Renee discovers a videocassette one day as she goes out to get the newspaper, the couple is horrified to learn that it depicts someone entering their apartment at night only to hover over their bed and film them as they sleep.

When the police are called in, Fred tells them that he always refused to own a videocam because he prefers the comfort of an inaccurate memory to the realities of his past. The movie seems to gloat over this particular phrase as another videocassette turns up, this time depicting Renee's savage murder at the hands of her husband who, dismayed and unremembering, is immediately thrown into jail to await his fate on death row.

Haunted by the brutal images of the video and tormented by migraines, Fred undergoes a physical transformation that forces the institution to free him when they fail to identify him as the death-row inmate, but as a man named Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty). Pete returns to his life as an auto mechanic and one day fixes the car of a Frank Booth-like mob boss (Robert Loggia) who literally owns his pretty girlfriend Alice (Arquette with a blond, as opposed to red, wig). Naturally, Pete and Alice begin a series of covert sexual encounters and decide to run away from the mob boss with money they plan to rob from a maker of pornographic films.



Patricia Arquette as Alice in *Lost Highway*.

Obviously *Lost Highway* has a broad range of dramatic and thematic interests that seem magnified once the little narrative logic the story has disintegrates. But despite this, *Lost Highway* keeps a tight grip on its central themes of fragmented desire, anxiety and corruption, preserving them within a spooky, unsettling gloss that makes this film an aural and visual horror film noir.

The story's sexual pitch, for example, exchanges passion for foreboding during the robbery scene in which a dismayed Pete watches Alice deprive a bloodied corpse of its money as a sadistic pornographic film — in which she stars — plays in the background. Her restorative love for Fred-turned-Pete is further betrayed when she is shown to have a link with the movie's satanic Mystery Man (Robert Blake). And while Pete overcomes the mob boss during a surreal murder sequence, chaos ultimately triumphs over a still-morphing Fred as he races down the dark highway at the movie's end.

It has always been a puzzling aspect of many of Lynch's films that they depict a startlingly puerile moral universe into which these themes encroach but are ultimately resisted (*Blue Velvet*, *Fire Walk With Me*), a

THE SUMMER IN HORROR

plot point which is desperately absent from *Lost Highway*. This absence, and its recriminations for the process of deriving meaning from this film, is perhaps the strongest reason why it remained one of last summer's most satisfying horror movies.

-Emma Anderson

Spaceships That Go Bump In The Night

Event Horizon
Starring Laurence Fishburne and Sam Neill
Directed by Paul Anderson
Written by Philip Eisner

The blockbuster horror event of the summer was the highly touted *Event Horizon*, a film which — despite being set fifty years in the future — found its inspiration in the classic horrors of fifty years back. Screenwriter Philip Eisner made little bones about the fact that Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting* (see also the 1959 film adaptation by Robert Wise) provided the stylistic blue print for *Event Horizon*'s series of fright scenes, scenes that fuelled the movie with dramatic suspense and genuine horror despite its being set in a sci-fi milieu.



The film opens up with the discovery of the eponymous Event Horizon, a colossal spaceship that went missing for eight years while on a pioneering mission to travel through an artificial black hole. The whereabouts of the ship for those eight years is a mystery to the crew who is sent out to reclaim it from the lightning scarred Neptunian skies around which it is lifelessly orbiting. The only clue to give them any indication of what to expect upon arrival is an eerie recording of a garbled transmission spoken in what seems to be Latin and uttered just before the ship entered artificial space.

Of course, things weren't all well on the Event Horizon, a fact that becomes clear once the crew board the ship and find gore splattered walls and a few mutilated and frozen corpses whirling around the zero gravity, subzero temperatures. As the crew settles in the spooks start to come out in droves, beginning with nightmare visions and was-it-really-there phantasms that increase in frequency and tenor until they threaten — and in some cases overcome — the psychological stability of the exploring crew members.

Up to this point *Event Horizon* is a classic horror film that achieves situations of genuine fear without having to wrestle with issues of dramatic credibility or fright scenes we've seen before. Within commercial horror cinema, that feat is nothing short of astounding. But if *Event Horizon* avoided the tired tricks of the horror trade, it *was* limited by the commercial grandeur of the project and by the blockbuster mentality that drove the creative decisions (the most grievous of which was a production committee's ruling to leave 30 minutes of character development on the cutting room floor). So in the end, Eisner and director Paul Anderson end up with a very spooky, very effective haunted house premise (complete with a spaceship architecturally designed after a castle) that progressively evolves into the fourth of July. Worst of all, the film's modus operandi (that the horror is unseen and therefore infinitely more frightening than anything that could have actually been shown on screen) is violated when Weir, the crew's resident 'scientist' (Sam Neill) is turned into a galactic Pinhead, something which rescinded much of the original territory the movie claimed over the genre.

Horror fans were nevertheless satisfied with many of *Event Horizon*'s chilling moments and its stylised and effective depictions of suicide, disembowelment, insanity, murder and the unnamable horror that descended on the crew of the ship the moment it initiated its maiden voyage. All of which argues quite strongly that, despite the commercial candy, Hollywood gets thumbs up for at least attempting a big budget flick with loyalties smack dab in the genre. It's just too bad that the big money is obsessed with thrilling an audience instead of letting the more subtle aspects of a film — frightening or otherwise — call the shots. *Event Horizon* might have troubled our sleep but half of the time it was for the wrong reasons.

-Rod Gudino

Celluloid Killed The Comics Star

Spawn
Starring Michael Jai White and Martin Sheen
Directed by Mark Dippe
Written by Alan McElroy

Created a mere five years ago by Canadian and *Spider-man* artiste extraordinaire Todd McFarlane, Spawn is born when covert government agent/assassin Al Simmons (Michael Jai White) is murdered by colleague Jason Wynn (Martin Sheen) and makes a pact with the devil: he agrees to be an agent in Hell's upcoming war against God if he is allowed passage back to Earth to see his wife Wanda.

Simmons returns five years after his death to find his wife has built herself a new life



Hideously scarred, and with powers he does not understand, the newly-named Spawn refuses to do the devil's work. At which point the demon issues his ultimatum: Spawn can use his powers for good, and therefore throw a wrench in the devil's plans, but if he uses up his power he dies (again), at which point his soul is forfeit. Or he can do nothing, and let the devil's other agents rein free on earth, creating chaos and thus fortifying his ever-growing army. Either way the devil wins, hence, Spawn's dilemma (note to Hollywood execs: this is called good drama).

Wisely, McFarlane chose not to reveal everything about his hero in the first issue of the comic, but rather let Spawn -- and the reader -- learn things bit by bit, providing tantalizing clues while increasing the story's ever-growing canvass.

Unfortunately, the movie presents everything to the viewer within the first ten minutes with such hamfisted exposition that those already unfamiliar with the *Spawn* story will find little to interest them in the following eighty minutes. Add to this, bad acting, bad dialogue, bad characterization, horrible music, passionless directing by Mark Dippe and an overdependence on computer generated effects and explosions, and the result is one major bore. Writer Alan McElroy may have been successful in faithfully adapting the basic story, but gravely misses the mark in copying the tone or character interplay which made the comic so compelling. The scenes in hell, for example, which should be imbued with great atmosphere and horror, are instead privy to some of the worst CGI effects seen since your average episode of *Hercules* (and about as scary).

Worst of all, Spawn's dilemma is totally absent from the screenplay. What was once the horror of a man coming to terms with his morals is quickly sidestepped in favour of another quick explosion. The audience is told that Simmons is a tragic figure but one never really understands why. What made perfect sense in the comic is completely muddled on screen. Some may say this is a result of condensing one year's worth of comic stories into a 90 minute movie. Really, it can all be summed up in two words: bad writing.

-Pedro Cabezuelo

Slasher Film Slasher

Scream
Starring Neve Campbell and Skeet Ulrich
Directed by Wes Craven
Written by Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson

Leave it to horrormeister extraordinaire Wes Craven to make the sleeper flick of the summer. And what more unlikely vehicle than a slasher film (ie: those movies populated by Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees and/or Freddy Krueger -- blood-soaked affairs that became *really* tired by the mid-eighties). Part of *Scream*'s charm, and one of the big reasons it grossed $80 million plus, was that it achieved the breakthrough moment of actually introducing a smattering of intelligence into a form where idiot-plot is a time-honoured convention. Craven achieved this by making his film self-conscious and self-referential, a strategy he attempted before with *New Nightmare* and to lesser effect with *Shocker*. This type of thing is usually a little tricky to pull off, but Craven did so admirably by keeping tongue firmly in cheek and adhering steadfastly to a mandate of frightening the audience.

Case in point: *Scream* opens up with one of the most harrowing takes on a common slasher movie plot element, namely the stranger on the telephone. In it, Casey Becker (Drew Barrymore) receives an anonymous telephone call from a darkly charming stranger who makes polite conversation about horror films (what else?) until the girl comes to the realisation that her caller is, in fact, very close at hand. Casey's panic is compounded with escalating intensity as she realises that she is a victim of a very elaborate -- and seriously dangerous -- scare tactic. Craven spares his audience no nerves in this scene, delivering an original combination of oddball humour and mounting suspense that wraps the scene up -- ten minutes into the film -- in the worst possible way. Definitely not for the squeamish.

Cut to Casey's highschool (the common slasher movie environment) where the traumatised and not-so-traumatised student body bandy our sympathies between black humour and a genuine revulsion for what happened in the opening sequence. Not surprisingly, Craven develops his film's inner audience through the highschool kids, whose lines double as a running commentary on the movie as it gets on with the task of hacking characters and uncovering the identity of the killer.

Throughout, Craven maintains a tight balance on his film's central ideas: to preserve the killer's identity until the last scene, to comment on the film without losing sight of the story and to genuinely scare the audience. He does so with a mix of skillful dialogue, clever juxtaposition and a good understanding of what makes people jump.

Scream has, for instance, a killer who gets beat up in almost every kill scene (the former is titillatingly funny, the latter is deadly serious) and who dresses in a costume caricature of the Grim Reaper, an effective combination of silliness and spookiness that embraces the dark irony in the film's narrative and critical voices. By the same token, an acoustic rendition of Don't Fear The Reaper accompanies a potentially fated love scene where the heroine's loss of virginity could mean her murder. Meanwhile, a bunch of highschool students, who do not realise they are being filmed, sit around watching "Wes Carpenter's" *Halloween* and debating how and why a slasher film is a slasher film -- as the unseen killer stalks in the background.

Despite its sophisticated ideas, *Scream* falters towards the end, a not unfamiliar issue with Craven who seems to be enamoured of heavily laboured, bombastic and convoluted endings. But even with this flaw, the film's central thesis is effectively communicated by the time things wrap up: that slasher cinema has developed a standard catalogue of plot elements which are just *begging* to be sent up. Because *Scream* devotes so much energy to doing so while simultaneously preserving itself as a film within the form, Craven reveals that he still has a soft spot for the genre, even if he shows us that he's been thinking about it. That fact alone might be all he needs to drive the coffin nail on movies of this type, and what better film to do so than this (*not on your life - the sequel is just entering post-production -Ed.*).

-Emma Anderson

Toronto to Transylvania: Season Guides Cross Borders and Artforms

The BFI Companion To Horror

Kim Newman, ed.

Cassell/Wellington House

A year on the market, *The British Film Institute's Companion To Horror* is far from an exhaustive compendium of accumulated data as it is a wide-screen sweep of the genre in several of its modern aesthetic permutations (mainly within the twentieth century with occasional historical lapses). While the book logically favours cinema (actors, directors, writers and technicians), it nevertheless attempts to include literature, television, radio, popular music, history and folklore in its ambitious portrayal of horror in the arts. The task is substantially, if not severely mitigated by a mere 352 pages (large sized with photos), but *The BFI Companion* nevertheless regains some of that lost ground simply by recognizing the subject matter's diversity of treatment within the arts.

Organization being what it is, it would seem that only the best possible ordering system would be implemented into a book juggling the genre thematically, historically and pan-culturally. God only knows why the classification system which eventually did get chosen for this book turned out to be a clumsy, awkward affair that is difficult to wade through. Information on *The Exorcist*, for example, can be found under "William Peter Blatty," "The Exorcist" or "Possession," but a search for *Peeping Tom* is fruitless unless one happens to look under the subject heading "Eyes." This wouldn't be so much of a problem with the aide of an index but, unfortunately, *The BFI Companion* provides none.

Standard figures like Edgar Poe, Dario Argento, Vincent Price and Tom Savini get equal treatment as Franz Kafka, Alice Cooper, Luis Buñuel and the Marquis de Sade, and explanations as to how these people specifically contributed to the genre are generally insightful and tagged with helpful bibliographies. Essays on select topics are inconsistently thorough, however, and range from uninspired to enlightening. Pornography gets an extended treatment, for example, as a format that had early associations with horror (obsession with flesh, opposition to censorship) and includes not only horror films with strong sexual content but horror themed porno films (!) and a list of porno stars who crossed over. On the other hand, The Devil gets less than adequate treatment as *the* key mythological figure of the genre's Western development and space is allotted to topics of dubious relevance (ie. Power Tools, Police).

All things told *The BFI Companion* is a valuable compendium to the many facets and nuances of the genre and to those works that are substantially related to it. A list of thirty six contributors with some notable critical voices (Les Daniels, Maitland McDonagh and Pete Tombs) give the editorial enough meaty substance to warrant actually going out and buying the thing. Strictly introductory then, but one of the best currently out there.

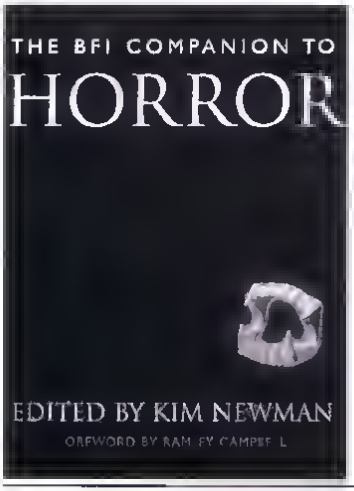
-Emma Anderson

Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide

Leonard Wolf

Broadway/Bantam

By definition, a connoisseur is an expert judge in specific matters of taste in art. In the strange case of *Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide*, the specific matter is the centenary anniversary of Bram Stoker's famous novel, the art is vampirology and the connoisseur is the reader. Hence the strangeness, for while author Leonard Wolf is all too eager to dub his readers 'Impalecntologists,' he bequeaths the title upon them before they've read his







"everything you wanted to know about the Count but were afraid to ask" compendium, which is much like referring to Jeckyl as Hyde when the potion has yet to be quaffed

To approach this book from a more topical perspective, consider that Wolf is the Van Helsing here (the eccentric expert, a.k.a. the connoisseur), where the readers are simply rats in Dracula's maze — Harkers, naturally.

Of course, in Stoker's novel, having endured the trials and tribulations set upon him by Dracula, Harker emerges better and stronger for it, though at some cost. In Wolf's all-purpose Dracula study, the cost to the reader involves withstanding the author's particularly self-indulgent and often flighty style, emulated here, painstakingly, by the humble reviewer. And don't get me started on Wolf's frequent, barely relevant, autobiographical ramblings.

The size of his unfettered (read: unedited) ego is understandable, as he is considered in many circles to be the world's premier (read: loudest) Dracula scholar. The former San Francisco State University professor has published horror criticism for over 25 years, and he acted as the historical consultant for the 'definitive' 1992 Dracula film collaboration between Coppola and the then-80-years-dead Stoker. Add to this credential mix the man's lupine surname, his Igor-tistical look and the fact that he was born in Transylvania — there's no disputing that Wolf is a dedicated, and well-informed, fanatic.

And really, what better tour guide for Vlad's inferno? By the end of Wolf's semi-mental journey, the reader (having paid the aforementioned price of enlightenment, which includes $22.95 CAN), does find it all worthwhile — given one final proviso.

Assume that the reader's knowledge of the notorious Count extends no further than the experience of reading the novel proper (familiarity with the Schreck, Lugosi, Lee, Kinski and/or Oldman movies being optional). In other words, assume that the reader is your average Dracula/vampire fan. Such children of the early evening will find that the lore waiting beyond the door is rich, multi-faceted and absolutely engaging.

"A guidebook can, and should, take you where you want to go," affable conductor Wolf comments in the introduction. "The whole point of this book," he adds, "is to illuminate, not explain." That Wolf's impressively broad examination of the Dracula legend enlightens, there is no doubt.

Wolf's strength as a collector of all things Voivode is his instinct for logical categorisation. His strength as a narrator is his understanding of the importance of temporal flow. To this end, while any of the 12 main sections that comprise *The Connoisseur's Guide* can be read/enjoyed/appreciated in and of themselves, one specific chapter forms the centre from which every effect ripples, and ties the package together neatly with a brilliant, blood-red bow.

That chapter, naturally, is the synopsis/investigation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (chapter 8), which deftly demonstrates how the novel both transcends mere Gothic and looks ahead to the as yet undeveloped realm of the filmic. Preceding sections deal with mythology (lore/death, blood and bats), biography (Vlad the Impaler, Stoker) and literary history (Gothic and vampire novels). Ensuing sections examine subsequent literary history, vampire cinema and the continuing social influence of Stoker's immortal novel — after all, it has never been out of print.

All things considered, *The Connoisseur's Guide* is an excellent, incisive almanac, in actuality, it's really more of a handy guide, good for conversation-starters with apprentices and aficionados alike. Die-hard fans of the undead Destroyer are likely to find that Wolf's teeth have less bite than his name suggests. Actual connoisseurs who have read either Paul Barber's *Vampires, Burial and Death*, Denis Buican's *Les Metamorphoses de Dracula* or Florescu Radu & Raymond McNally's *Prince of Many Faces* will probably look upon Wolf's work much like philosophers look upon Kurt Vonnegut's fantastic scope, simplistic execution. Or, if you prefer, a long cut, but not a deep one.

-Gary Butler

Haunted Toronto

John Robert Colombo

Hounslow Press

John Robert Colombo's *Haunted Toronto* sets out to be the first comprehensive "ghostbuster's guide" to Canada's largest city. Split into convenient sections (i.e. North, South, Central, East, and West) with documented addresses for each haunting, the guidebook makes it easy for the reader to make his/her way to a wide assortment of mysterious sites in Toronto. Despite all this, the book does anything but inspire one to visit even a single one of the detailed sites.

The problem? *Haunted Toronto*'s pedestrian writing style and drab, black-and-white photos and illustrations would fail to entertain even a young adult audience. Each entry is prefaced by a few catchy (read: cheesy) sentences, much like the pithy comments on the covers of R. L. Stine's derivative *Goosebumps*

New & Upcoming



Chaos! Releases Megadeth Line

Chaos! Comics has released a new quarterly series based on the lyrical universe of the heavy metal act Megadeth. The series saw its inception this past August with comic adaptations of songs culled from Megadeth's debut album *Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good*. Chaos!, best known for their *Lady Death* and *Evil Ernie* comics, were apparently drawn by the horrific tenor behind the band's lyrics.

"Horror fiction in comic books have attained mainstream appeal much in the same way as Stephen King novels have," said Brian Pulido, founder of Chaos! and one of the chief writers behind the project (Pulido's adaptation of Megadeth's *Skull Beneath The Skin* leads off the first issue). The comic will focus principally on the band's lyrics in the adaptations, which are expected to span the group's eight album career.

"Truth is stranger than fiction and comic/horror fiction has an affinity for touching on subjects that are borderline taboo," agreed Dave Mustaine, Megadeth's lead singer, guitarist and principal songwriter. "Part of what Megadeth has been about is going into areas that most people are too intimidated to touch."

Expect the success of the series to ride the wave of Megadeth's latest album, titled *Cryptic Writings*, which has enjoyed substantial North American success in the five months since its release.

books for children. For example, to hook you into the tale of the Haunted Elevator, Colombo writes, "Would you ride the haunted elevator? Up... or down!" Add to this, the author vows in the preface to refrain from using adjectives like "gloomy" or "scary" because he considers the details of his recounted tales to be "riveting enough" in and of themselves. Presumably, however, he has no compunction using words like "frightening," "sad," or "strange."

Then there is the matter of sources, which Colombo carefully lists before recounting each tale. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that he relies too heavily on some of the same sources for a number of different entries, many of which cite only a single source. Taken together, these facts suggest that Colombo neglected to research his tales thoroughly and, as a result, will play into the hands of the reader with a sceptical disposition.

To be fair, some of the recounted tales do carry a germ of the wonder with which they have been passed from generation to generation, most notably the stories about the University College ghost, the haunted Chinese Restaurant, and the haunting of Mackenzie House.

Other tales range from plain boring to simply offensive — it is one thing to write a tract on the paranormal, but it is quite another to take a national icon like Robertson Davies and speculate that he may now be haunting his old stomping grounds at Massey College (University of Toronto).

Colombo tells us that the name "Toronto" came from the language of the Huron Indians and that the word means "place of meaning." *(Actually, Toronto means "place of meeting" - Ed.)* He concludes: "Toronto may thus be said to be a place where human beings encounter the known — and the unknown." It's a pretty flimsy closer and one of the many reasons why this book will be entirely ignored by all but the coffee table intelligentsia.

-James Perretta

LEXX continued from pg 7

which are just so exquisitely beautiful; there's one shot where a kid is walking and the camera pulls into focus and you see a clock hanging from a tree with a spike driven through it. Then a girl goes into a bone room with chicken feathers on the floor and chickens in cages and a shrine of some awful combination of human and animal bones and then she just starts retching. To me there hasn't been anything as horrific since.

Do you think the genre is still interesting?

Yes, it's interesting and always will be interesting because it's as old as the hills. It's the bastard step-child of fiction and film but I think it's as important as any other strain of fiction because it fulfils crucial psychological functions that everybody has. Everybody's wondered what it's like to die, everyone knows what pain is, everyone's got fears. I think it was Stephen King who talked about feeding the alligators. You've got alligators up there, you can feed them or you can ignore them and then they can get real hungry. I believe in feeding the alligators because I think that horror can actually be tremendously humanizing and civilizing if it's done properly. There's a lot of exploitative stuff out there — which I don't have a problem with either — but I think that really good horror is good for you psychologically.

Lex Gigeroff continues to be involved with LEXX: The Dark Zone Stories *pending serialization and will also be hosting a new show on the Comedy Network titled* El Mundo Del Lundo.



Sex, violence and weirdness. Eva Habermann as Zev



Games continued from pg 5

I will be honest, I could barely even get started on this game, probably because the rules are so incredibly complicated. Perhaps I am not patient enough or just not so inclined, but I felt overwhelmed and utterly confused by the myriad of regulations and convoluted game mechanics.

The only thing that sort of helped was that much of *Inferno* is based on concepts and combat actions from *Abyss*, which is why I cannot imagine trying to decipher these rules without having previously played *Abyss*. I also found it somewhat annoying that the game included only two dice while much of the rolls required up to eight, meaning that you have to memorize as you roll or resort to pulling the dice from all your other board games. Not that it's such a huge deal but I feel that games should be as user friendly as possible. Similarly, it became apparent after a short period of time that the character sheets at the back needed to be photocopied to prevent consulting the back of the rulebook. Why wasn't any thought given to this inconvenience?

Overall, I found this game to be quite boring, much too complex and not strategic enough, not to mention a little superficial in its treatment of the genre, the only thing truly horrific about *Inferno* was trying to figure out how to play it! Once again, the best thing I can say about this game is that it looks great, but the content needs some serious makeup.

Test players: Steve Cameron, Dan Cook, Bryan Hamburg, Kevin Semande, John Van Rijs, Dave West.

Classic Cut

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

(1962, USA)
Starring Candace Hilligoss, Frances Feist and Sidney Berger
Produced and directed by Herk Harvey
Written by John Clifford II

For a cheap ($30,000) black-and-white 85 minute feature that was the sole filmmaking effort of director Harold "Herk" Harvey *Carnival Of Souls* has had tremendous influence in the thirty-five years since its release. It was for George Romero, who confessed to being inspired by it for *Night Of The Living Dead* and David Lynch, who saw this movie prior to making *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*. Critical appraisal, while sparse, has nevertheless seen fit to compare parts of *Carnival Of Souls* to great works of surrealist and minimalist cinema.

Shot in 1961 in Lawrence, Kansas, *Carnival Of Souls* went on to garner a cult following over the years, largely from late night television viewers and those with a sweet tooth for nostalgic film noir. Several years ago, however, the film experienced a resurgence of interest across the US, and became a feature in art houses especially in and around Halloween. It has, of late, become an item of discussion among critics and connoisseurs who disagree on the artistic value of the film, if not on how much historical import it actually deserves. Whatever the case, *Carnival Of Souls* offers a startlingly unique viewing experience of "masterful naivete" (Washington Post), despite its less than stellar acting and modest budgetary constraints.



Not surprisingly, the movie provides the type of story that would be at home in a typical episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but which is made eerie in the telling beyond that show's capacity. It concerns Mary Henry (Candace Hilligoss), a young woman who is sent plummeting off a bridge with her friends during a drag-race with some neighbourhood boys. After emergency workers spend hours frantically searching for the sunken car, Mary appears on a sandbar, mud-covered and confused but otherwise unharmed. She recollects little and seems to grieve less, unnerving the local pastor at the church where she plays the organ with her flagrant cynicism.

In fact, Mary is unable to feel grief or loss, but she reveals that she does have the capacity to experience fear one night as she drives through the desert towards Utah and spies a white-faced ghoul staring at her through the window. The appearance of the ghoul causes her to drive off the road, later re-appearances will make it a key instigator to Mary's psychological, sexual and spiritual disintegration. She finds herself repulsed by the advances of a man across the hall (Sydney Berger as John Linden) and has hallucinatory day dreams, but it is her tired agnosticism which causes the greatest reactions. "A church is just a place of business," she says, shocking even the highly irreligious Linden. And the pastor is outraged that she plays "ungodly" music after-hours at the new church. These social pressures eventually force Mary to a confrontation and questioning of her agnosticism, sending her already fragile psyche into a place of spiritual isolation, precisely the dilapidated pavilion of the film's title.

Much has been said about the cinematic style of *Carnival Of Souls*, and the way it throws the viewer into maximum imbalance with the simplest of effects. Harvey's deadpan camerawork, for example, makes the most mundane places and people imaginable seem like ghastly hallucinations, and the director shows a flair for elegantly employing existing locations and lighting for maximum disorientation value. By isolating the inconsequential things of daily existence — the deep shadows of high noon at the carnival pavilion, a stranger's glance, a shot, from below, of a car being lowered on a hydraulic lift — the film makes a fascinating rendering of mental and spiritual crisis.

Herk Harvey made no other fictional features, going on to pursue a career in educational and industrial filmmaking, and none of his actors developed careers in film. It's a thought provoking addendum to this movie because it bears uncanny resemblance to the film's romantic — if predictable — ending. And it brings us back to the key point of contention in critical discussion about *Carnival Of Souls*, should it remain among the obscure classics of chill-up-the-spine cinema, or should it be celebrated as something much more than that?

-Emma Anderson

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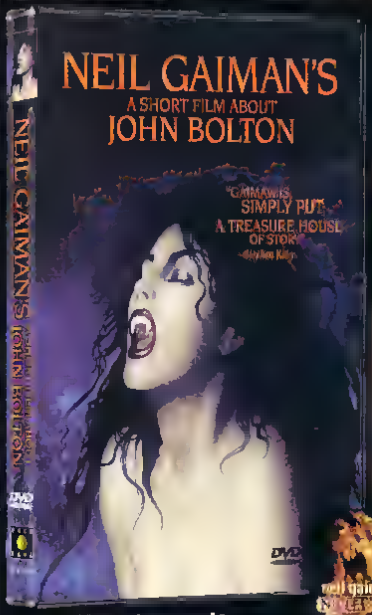
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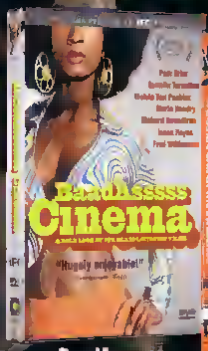
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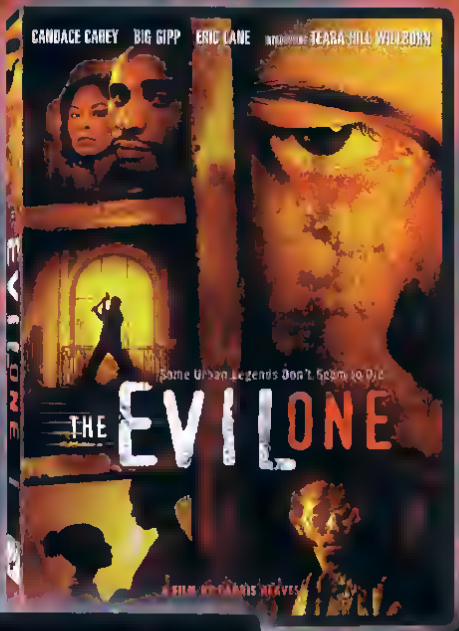
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February 1998

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Note From Underground

#2

It was someone in *The Real Thing* (as unhorrific a play as one might expect from Tom Stoppard) who remarked on the nature of words, specifically how they are innocent of the crimes which writers make them commit. Words — the argument went — are neutral by nature, neither possessing grandeur or baseness but, depending on the particular order in which an author arranges them, capable of producing works of infinite beauty or unforgivable banality.

It is the same thing when we speak of genre. Genre is the great catch phrase of the commercial arts, it is the class system by which the modern consumer divies up power to make an aesthetic hierarchy — a Great Chain of Art as it were — that governs not only the way we understand, but the way we consume art, and consequently influence its development.

But the power lies not only in the people, of course. Markets being what they are, manufacturers and producers have pared their products down to identifiable creatures within the market place. Once academic ordering systems, genres have translated the Dionysian dialect of art into the Apollonian vernacular of capitalism. Which is why we have a type of market reverence for this sort of thing, and why there is nothing as frustrating to a producer than handling a novel, a film or even a comic book that teeters into that great grey expanse, that *terra incognita* outside of the boundaries of identifiable genre.

What genres *are* capable of giving us is a system of rudimentary identification, a connect the dots between works of art and people's interests. For this very basic function, genres are indispensable and necessary to the intelligible distribution of commercial art. What a genre cannot do, try as it might, is *define* artforms, when it attempts to do so, we inevitably run into logistical problems.

It is a lesson that is perhaps most pertinent to a commercial artform as readily identifiable as horror. Usually, people want to be notified when they are about to be exposed to horror, mainly because — as genre — it has specialized interests that are not to everyone's liking. Marketers understand this, and govern themselves accordingly. But when horror stops being horror, or rather, when horror breaks outside of its immediate market boundaries, things get a little hairy.

What ensues is usually a game of semantics, where new genres or sub-genres are introduced to give the troubling art in question a proper name. This is a workable solution for the market (the difference between horror, terror and suspense with a caution tag is often unintelligible without reference to particular trends), but not for a definitive solution to what makes horror art.

If, let's say, we classify Ridley Scott's *Alien* as "outer space horror," does that mean that 'science fiction" ipso facto cannot include chest bursting scenes? If we are to conclude, based on the lack of a supernatural monster in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, that it is therefore *not* a horror film, are we then to draw the same conclusion for Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*? Dario Argento's *Deep Red*?

And what are we to say of the ambiguities? Films like George Romero's *Martin*, where a boy who drinks blood may or may not be a supernatural vampire. Would knowing whether he is or isn't really make a difference? Would it really further our understanding somehow, to conclude that it is an instance of "dark drama" rather than horror?

Genres, like words, function in context, and to that extent they are malleable. Our context at *Rue Morgue* is an overriding interest in the experience of horror as it is represented in art. Period. Whether that be from interstellar boogie men or from chainsaws, from the gag reflex or the cerebral cortex makes no difference at all.

-RG

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199 Avenue Road, Suite 534
Toronto ON
M5R 2J3
Phone 416-964-6657
morgue@istar.ca
http://home.istar.ca/~morgue

Publisher & Editor
ROD GUDINO

Associate Editor
MARY-BETH HOLLYER

Contributors
EMMA ANDERSON
GARY BUTLER
PEDRO CABEZUELO
ISABELLE GOWDIE
PETTER QUE
DAN ZACHARIAH

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X-Files on tour, King episode to air

Creators of the *X-Files* recently announced that the X-Files Expo, a travelling theme park of show memorabilia, will be taking to the road this summer. The show will kick off March 6 in San Francisco and will travel to Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, Miami Chicago, Detroit, Boston, New York and Washington DC (as of yet, no shows in Canada have been announced). The Expo will apparently be held in airplane hangars and abandoned military bases to complement common settings and locales of the show. X-Files Expo will feature interactive games, a preview of the highly anticipated X-Files feature film and appearances by people involved in the television programme.

However, there has been no word yet as to whether the show's two stars, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson, will be making appearances. According to a spokesman from Twentieth Century Fox, organizers are still in talks with the pair.

The long awaited episode of the *X-Files* written by Stephen King is scheduled to air as the tenth episode this season. Titled Chinga, the episode will most probably air sometime in February. Representatives from the Fox Television network have stated the *X-Files* television show will run at least another two seasons.

Carrie unearthed at last



Rykodisc and MGM have bandied together to release the music for Brian de Palma's *Carrie* for the first time on compact disc. The soundtrack, by Pino Donaggio, captures a balance of terror and sympathy in the style of the classic Bernard Herrmann score for Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

The deluxe CD includes remastered original soundtrack, new artwork, extensive liner notes, photos, bonus incidental dialogue and a reproduction of the original movie poster. As well, an enhanced CD segment previews the home video release and features the original theatrical trailer in full motion presentation.

The Sync, an audio/video broadcast company, has announced that it will debut two of the most influential horror films of all time on the Internet. The world's very first vampire film, *Nosferatu*, and what many consider to be the first cult film ever, *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari*, are both available for download in RealVideo format from The Sync's website at http://thesync.com/ondemand.

Since its debut in 1922, *Nosferatu* has been regarded by most film historians as the finest cinematic excursion into the realm of the undead. Borrowing liberally from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, (and resulting in a world-famous copyright infringement trial which nearly lead to the total destruction of the film), *Nosferatu* offers Max Schreck on the prowl as the vampire in search of nourishment. The running time is 80 minutes.

Classic Horrors on the Net

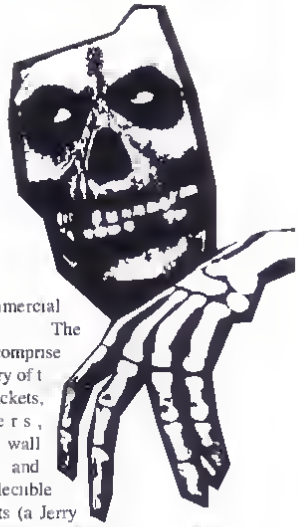


The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, the tale of a dubious mesmerist who keeps a sleepwalker as his prisoner and orders him to commit crimes, established the groundwork in psychological cinema and subjective story telling. Made in 1919, the film's running time is 60 minutes.

–With files from Hellnotes



Hate the Living, Love the MISFITS



How Misfits' Legacy of Horror Became a Career Saving Commodity

BY EMMA ANDERSON

In the 1970s, gimmick was everything in rock music. You would do well to recall acts like KISS and Alice Cooper, who rose to superstardom as much on the strength of their music as on the theatrics they took to the stage. Even the counter-current of punk that entered the scene in the late '70s could not rid itself of the trappings of the age. The Sex Pistols might have fought every notion associated with popular music, but their pins and painted hair amounted to a new kind of fashion statement -- and "anarchy" a new kind of gimmick.

It was logical, therefore, that the idea also carry over with later incarnations of the Pistols' counter-current fad, groups like New York Dolls, The Cramps and especially The Misfits, who chose to dress up spitfire punk rock anthems in the glamour of B-horror movies from the 1950s and 60s.

"We call it a disease and we try to infect anyone we can," proclaims bassist Jerry Only laughing as he discusses Misfits' obsession with the macabre. "It goes back to when we were kids watching Chiller Theatre."

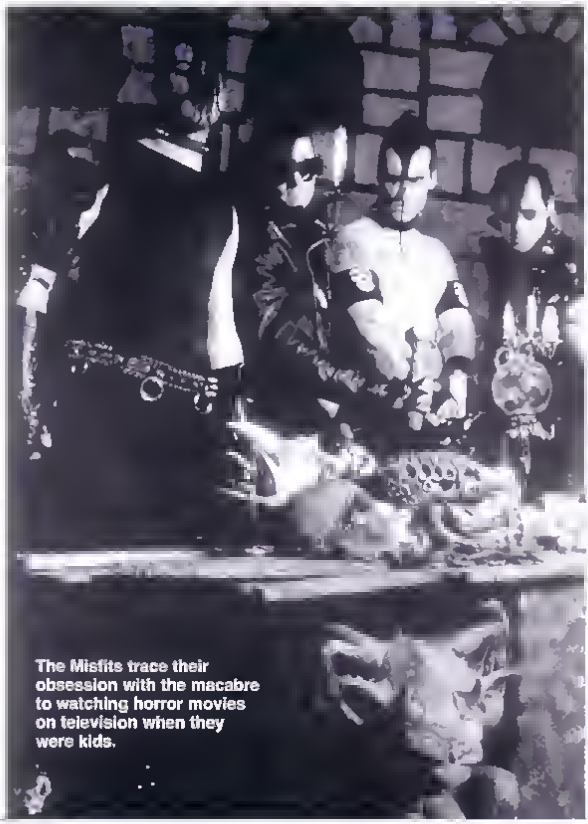
Jerry Only is the sole original member of the New Jersey based punk quartet that entered the music scene twenty years ago merely to disintegrate — like the zombies that infested their songs — at a Halloween show in 1983. But in just six years, the band had articulated their image to such degree that it ultimately became as important to the preservation of their self-proclaimed "legacy of brutality" as the actual music.

Despite the staunch punk rock roots which have always kept the Misfits at the fringes of popular music, the band's related merchandise is virtually unrivalled in terms of commercial grandeur. The Misfits comprise an industry of t shirts, jackets, stickers, posters, wall plaques and even collectible model kits (a Jerry Only figurine has just been unveiled). In fact, *The San Antonio Express News* reports that since the band's demise, the Misfits have become one of the most fervently collected rock groups ever.

At the heart of that industry is the horror gimmick that singled them out even where their music — a generic form of hardcore punk — could not. More than anything, it was the Misfits' gimmick — monster-movie motifs, spooky lyrics, and live shows that were a visual feast of amplifiers, skulls, face paint, devil-locks, and muscle (bandmembers collectively adopted the practice of bodybuilding) — that made them an underground legend. Their leering Crimson Ghost logo (culled from the 1946 horror serial of the same name - pictured above) has become an icon and early recordings with original artwork are treasured by members of Misfits' so-called Fiend Club.

"The collectability is out of control," admits Only. "Our original records go for more than Elvis' original records. To me that's absurd."

Most of the band's full-length releases are fairly common, as are subsequent compilations (*Legacy of Brutality*, *Misfits*, *Collection 1 and 2* and a coffin-shaped box set), but many of the band's original, early releases on the Plan 9 label are



The Misfits trace their obsession with the macabre to watching horror movies on television when they were kids.

considered rarities. A typical Misfits record usually retails for over $30, while a hard-to-find collectible, such as the band's *Beware* UK import sells for $500 to $1,000.

"I don't condone that," says Only. "I gotta say I'm very proud of the fact that someone thinks that highly of us, but if I got a 15-year-old kid who's working all summer mowing lawns, I don't want him subjected to paying that kind of money."

Tellingly, however, Only opted to own the Misfits image rather than the music, after a lengthy courtship battle with original singer Glenn "Evil Elvis" Danzig, following the fateful Halloween gig. The settlement, which took ten years to reach, gave Danzig the publishing rights to all original Misfits music, while Only took the rights for the group's market-charged name and the highly valued Crimson Ghost logo.

"A lot of people told me, 'hey, there's a lot of money in music publishing,' and all this kind of stuff," he says. "And I said to them, 'look, there are two things in this world: there's the guy who can go out and play the music, and then there's the guy who gets the check in the mail for the music.' When Guns 'N' Roses or Metallica play my stuff and I don't like the way they did it, I don't want no fuckin' money for that."

But the deal also made a lot of economic sense. Ownership of name and logo meant that Only would receive all revenues from the sale of merchandise, a point that cannot be underestimated taking into account that — in the economics of the music business — performances are often little more than promotional vehicles for the sale of band related product.

Most importantly, however, the settlement also allowed a newly re-created Misfits — now comprised of Only and fellow band-members Doyle "Wolfgang Von Frankenstein," Dr. CHUD (Cannibalistic Humanoid Underground Drummer) and new vocalist Michale Graves — to re-open for business.

They did so with last year's release of *American Psycho*, their first album in fourteen years, on Geffen Records. While the album takes its name from the notorious novel by Brett Easton Ellis, the songs remain steadfast to the group's penchant for exploring the canon of classic horror cinema. Among the song titles: Abominable Dr. Phibes, Walk Among Us, The Hunger, This Island Earth, Crimson Ghost, Day Of The Dead, The Haunting, Speak Of The Devil, Shining, and even an ode to the recently released (though clearly retrospective) Mars Attacks. As expected, both logo and Crimson Ghost appear on the album cover, along with a new emphasis: Free Poster Inside!

"The artwork has a lot to do with the title of the record," explains Only. "We're trying to portray the horror image that we had with the old, black and white B-films. Vampires, monsters, alien invasions, Frankenstein — we got it all covered. *American Psycho*, of course, is about the book, but the thing is that we specifically target that trademark."

In one sense, the revivified Misfits are merely putting flesh and blood back into a highly lucrative merchandising business that has held up for two decades. While Only would prefer to place a stress on the music, he is vocal about the amount of time he spends keeping the band's image commercially active. He is personally involved, along with brother Doyle, in fashioning and designing most of the band's equipment at the family's Vernon based tool-and-die shop. The guitars are made from graphite, Doyle's amplifiers are completely built from scratch with inset glow-in-the-dark skulls, and Only's bass cabinets have been modified to resemble coffins.

"We have a 32-inch bass drum," he says. "We have [former drummer] Robo's original 28 mounted inside of a 32, then we got the big spikes that go around the front with the name on it. Then the two floor toms - each one is two 22-inch bass drums strapped together. So our drums are theoretically twice as big as anybody else's, since each drum is a double drum. We use bass drums for floor toms."

Their efforts were not lost among members of the Misfits' Fiend Club, who clambered into concert halls all throughout last year to catch a glimpse of the self-proclaimed "famous monsters of punk rock." And the Misfits delivered: ghoulish make-up, instruments shaped like weapons, and lightning fast anthems of dismemberment, demonic possession and cannibalism. And in the background, over it all, the glowing, ever leering visage of the Crimson Ghost.

"People like to be entertained by horror and science fiction," says Only. "So if you've got a band that's out doing science fiction songs looking like monsters, you're able to last a lot longer than a band that represents a social problem, which doesn't take long to outgrow its time."

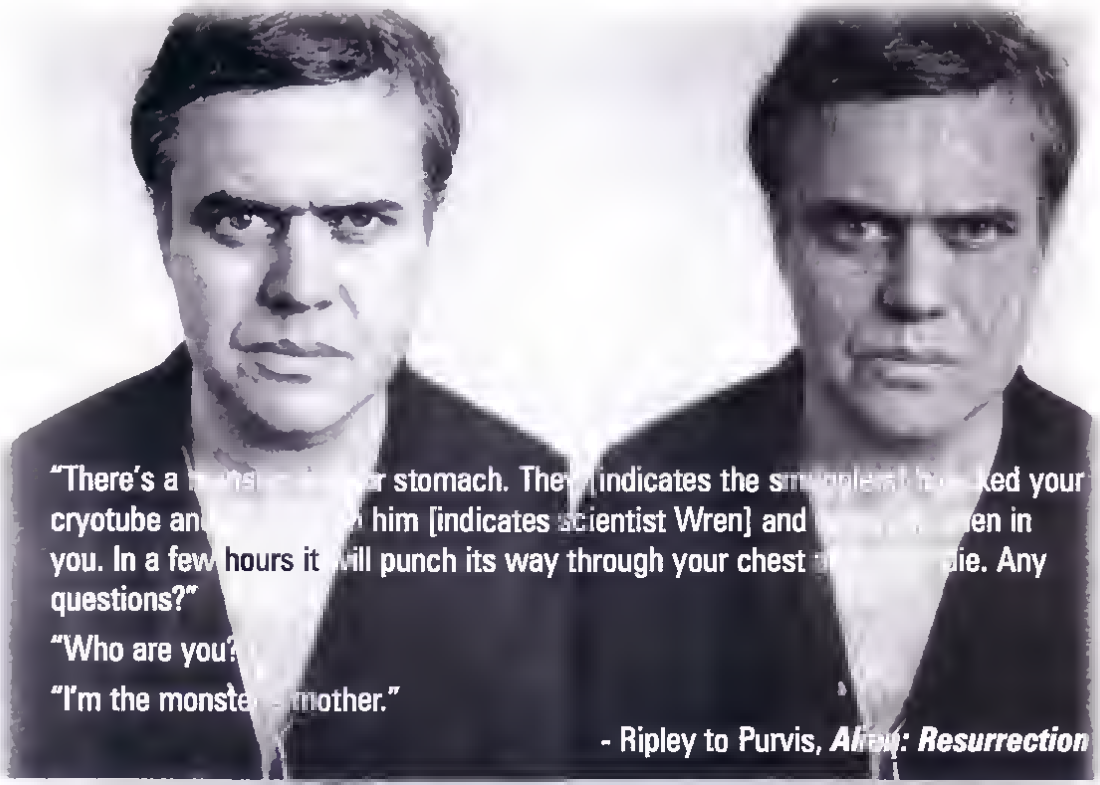
Misfits Selected Discography*

*singles, *albums* unless otherwise noted

Cough Cool/She (Blank, 1977)
***Static Age* (1978 - unreleased)**
Bullet/We Are 138/Attitude/Hollywood Babylon (Plan 9, 1978)
Horror Business/Teenagers From Mars/Children In Heat (Plan 9, 1979)
Night Of The Living Dead/Where Eagles Dare/Rat Fink (Plan 9, 1979)
***Beware* EP (Cherry Red UK, 1980)**



London Dungeon/Horror Hotel/Ghoul's Night Out a.k.a *Three Hits From Hell* (Plan 9, 1981)
Halloween/Halloween II (Plan 9, 1981)
Evilive (Plan 9, 1982)
***Walk Among Us* (Ruby/Slash, 1982)**
***Evilive* (Aggressive Rock Productions, 1983)**
***Earth A.D./Wolf's Blood* (Plan 9, 1983)**
Attitude (from *Flipside* Vynil Fanzine Vol. 2; Flipside, 1984)
***Die, Die My Darling* EP (Plan 9, 1984)**
***Legacy Of Brutality* (Caroline, 1986)**
***Misfits* (Caroline, 1987)**
***Collection I* (Plan 9, 1988)**
***Collection II* (Caroline, 1995)**
***Misfits Box* (four CDs, includes *Static Age*; Caroline, 1996)**
***American Psycho* (Geffen, 1997)**



"There's a [illegible] stomach. They [indicates the sm[illegible]] [illegible]ked your cryotube an[illegible] him [indicates scientist Wren] and [illegible]en in you. In a few hours it will punch its way through your chest [illegible]ie. Any questions?"

"Who are you?"

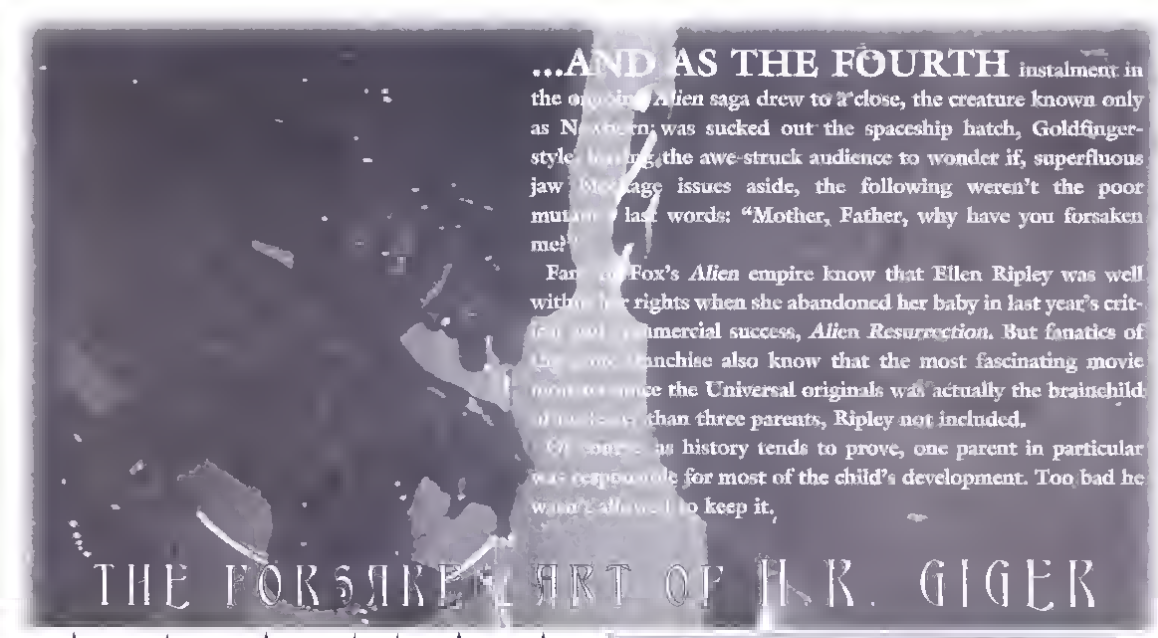
"I'm the monste[illegible]mother."

- Ripley to Purvis, ***Alien: Resurrection***



"As for those [illegible]e for this conspiracy: all I can wish them is an Alien breeding inside [illegible] chests, which might just remind them that the "Alien Father" is H.R. Giger."

- H.R. Giger to 20th Century Fox, ***Alien: Insurrection***



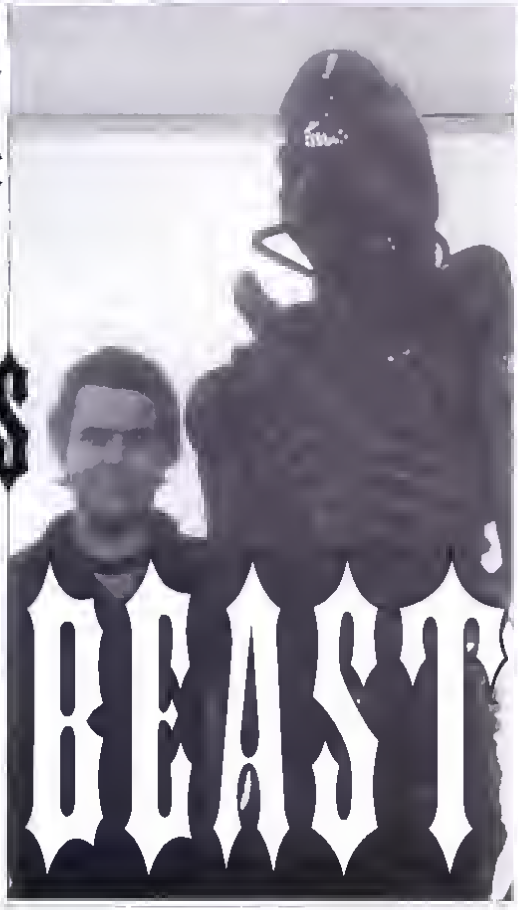
...AND AS THE FOURTH instalment in the ongoing *Alien* saga drew to a close, the creature known only as Newborn was sucked out the spaceship hatch, Goldfinger-style, leaving the awe-struck audience to wonder if, superfluous jaw and cleavage issues aside, the following weren't the poor mutant's last words: "Mother, Father, why have you forsaken me?"

Fans of Fox's *Alien* empire know that Ellen Ripley was well within her rights when she abandoned her baby in last year's critical and commercial success, *Alien Resurrection*. But fanatics of the *Alien* franchise also know that the most fascinating movie monster since the Universal originals was actually the brainchild of more than three parents, Ripley not included.

Of course, as history tends to prove, one parent in particular was responsible for most of the child's development. Too bad he wasn't allowed to keep it.

THE FORSAKEN ART OF H.R. GIGER

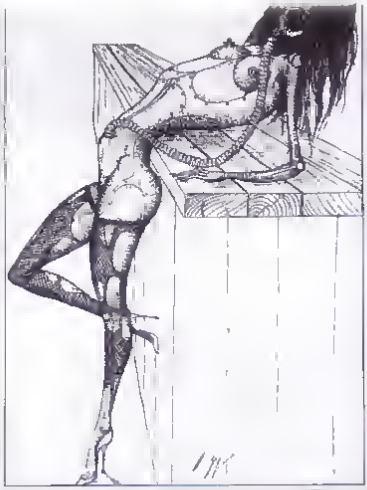
FATHER KNOWS BEAST



In the beginning, the only Alien was an awkward, eccentric and dangerously intelligent young boy born in Chur, Switzerland on February 5, 1940. Hans Ruedi Giger's natural artistic talents - and his disturbing perspectives - were not to blossom until his late teens, at which point they spread like nightshade-fuelled wildfire. His years studying industrial design at the School of Applied Arts in Zurich, from the ages 24 to 26, provided the first turning point in the radical artist's life, as Giger intersected practical knowledge (landscape design) with personal interest (dreamscape depiction) in a disquieting, sexually charged manner. And if the first turning point forged Giger's career, surely the second secured his future, when, 13 years later, the film *Alien* was unleashed.

Giger describes the fruits of his vision as "Fantastic Art." An effective summary, insofar as the word "fantastic" can simultaneously connote beauty, grotesqueness and unreality, when specifically

BY GARY BUTLER



"Beauty, grotesqueness and unreality."

applied to an artistic viewpoint, it suggests something not just surreal but *beyond* surreal. And certainly, anyone familiar with Giger's art would agree that his creations come from beyond.

It's tempting to further qualify Giger's specialty as "futuristic" fantastic art. Easily the man's best-known work is his ever-expanding canon of (again as described by Giger) "biomechanical" landscapes. Giger's concept of biomechanics is brilliant in its simplicity, as the term's prefix implies a living organism, while its root insists on a machine. The artist's masterstroke came from applying this fresh, dark idea not to the obvious choice - people - but to the obscure alternative places. The master biomechanic doesn't draw living humanoid robots, he creates breathing industrial cities. Populated cities, granted, but in this instance, the inhabitants are a *part* of the landscape, and it builds them - they do not build it.

Hence the futuristic reading of Giger's work - for how else has the 20th century imagined humanity's future if not in terms of a technological Mecca that surpasses its wildest evolutionary dreams?

And nightmares.

When Ellen Ripley and the doomed crew of the Nostromo answer a distress call in *Alien* in the far future (real time: 1979), they learn that hell isn't other people so much as other species.

Alien earned Giger an Academy Award for Best Achievement in Visual Effects. In retrospect, this is hardly surprising, considering that the man had been dreaming of the Alien and its environment - and capturing those dreams in portraits - for well over a decade before the movie was even in its nascent stage.

The most critical step in the evolution of the Alien creature came in the form of the companion pieces *Necronom IV* and *Necronom V*, painted by Giger in 1976 as part of a larger series devoted to a symbolic realisation of H.P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*. Even at this pre-production stage the Alien was essentially complete; really, the only significant difference between the Alien in Giger's paintings and the one that would grace the screen three years later was the long-headedness, so to speak, of the Giger original (perhaps this is a good time to mention that the ever-dubbing artist uses the term "erotoscapes" to describe the majority of his pointedly sexual biomechanical landscapes).

Screenwriter Dan O'Bannon and director Ridley Scott became the aforementioned additional parents of the Alien. Inspired beyond words by the pair of *Necronom* portraits - Scott is famous for having been able to say little more than "That's it!" - they worked closely with Giger after 20th Century Fox approved six original silkscreen prints that the artist based upon O'Bannon's script, and together the trio further developed and refined the look and feel of the Alien and its setting.

The result: a true monster.

In more ways than one.

Today, almost two decades later, as the millennium looms over the horizon, Giger's Alien has become an almost mythical creature the world over. For the artist himself, though, it has likely become a chimera that is equal parts angel and albatross. The reasons for the angel are apparent, those for the albatross are absurd. They are nonetheless real.

One is a matter of insurrection. As cited in the introduction, *Alien: Insurrection* is an online protest housed on Giger's authorised homepage (www.HRGiger.com). The complaint: nowhere in the movie *Alien Resurrection* is the artist credited for original Alien design, though the origins of the movie's creatures are undeniable. It's hardly arguable that this was an oversight on the part of 20th Century Fox, as the company was guilty of the same gaffe when *Alien*^{3} was first released in 1992. That mistake was redressed at Giger's rightful insistence, the same, however, cannot be said in the current case.

"*Alien: Resurrection* is an excellent film," Giger writes in a letter to Fox posted on the site and dated Nov. 13/96, two full weeks before the official release of the movie. "[But] what would it look like without my Alien life-forms?" Though *Alien: Insurrection* also displays support from Ridley Scott, Timothy Leary, Clive Barker, Harlan Ellison, Dan O'Bannon and *Alien: Resurrection* director Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the power of rhetoric has done little to advance the unfortunate artist's cause.

The nature of Giger's other Alien albatross is simpler, though just as ironic. As fate - and good marketing - had it, a compendium of Giger art was published late last fall. Named after the aforementioned website (sans the dots), *WWW.HR.Giger.com* is by no means the first book of collected Giger art to grace a coffee table. But unlike its predecessors, which include the immensely popular *HR Giger's Necronomicon*, *HR Giger's Alien* and *HR Giger Arh+*, *WWW.HR.Giger.com* is the first book of Giger art to examine the man as a career artist. Think of it as his tickle trunk.

While Giger's thematic interests have remained consistent throughout his 30+ year



Landscape design and dreamscape depiction come together in "Landscape XVIII."



Freudian Grip: the proposed (and rejected) sandworm from Dune.

career, *WWW HR Giger com* introduces the world to a visionary artist who creates much more than mere Aliens and who has never hesitated to experiment with mediums of expression

Granted, the Alien was an afterbirth of Giger's airbrushed erotoscapes, and it is for those works that he is best known That said, significantly less than the majority of the book is comprised of either biomechanical studies or erotoscapes, the two categories combined likely account for 1/4 of the 280 illustrations represented, though theirs are admittedly the most lavish and sizeable when included (employed mostly as chapter dividers)

WWW HR Giger com also offers commentary from Giger throughout, indeed, the artist designed the book himself As his works are presented for the most part sequentially, the result is a biographical odyssey through a heretofore undiscovered country Though only a few true blue Aliens raise their heads for the passers-by, the sights are still well worth writing home about.

Here are just some of the highlights Giger "confirms" Freud's dream theory in the early sketch series *A Feast for the Psychiatrist*. He shows off his personal and professional furniture design and interior decoration, the professional aspect of which includes planning maps and realised photographs of Giger-Bars in Tokyo and Chur (featuring the latter's bathroom, which inspires leg-crossing) as well as set design for a scrapped 1976 film version of *Dune* Giger displays what are in his eyes the most important works in his private collection of art, the contents of which vary from the surreal to the surrealer (incl Brus, Sandoz and one of his greatest inspirations, Kuhn). Some of his classic biomechanic studies are presented in rich, gorgeous 3D, *Necronom IV* is one of them Pictures of the "open-air museum" of tattooed Giger fans receive an entertaining chapter Album cover art evolution is examined, including the 1981 bio-mechanisation of Blondie's Debbie Harry and the 1993 Cronenberg-via-*Dead Ringers* sculpture entitled *Life Support* for metal band Carcass' *Heartwork* The equally Cronenbergian "killer condoms" are shown in both their developmental sketch phases and their fully fleshed-(inside-)out phases, this section also includes the obvious killer condom prototype, the *Dune* sandworm, from the failed 1976 film project

> "Necessity is the mother of invention, but for Giger, it has become the father of insurrection."



Erotoscape: one of the many sights along Giger's Garden Train.

Artistic variety aside, though, truly the most surprising sections of *WWW HR Giger com* are humour oriented, despite the fact that Giger undertakes every humorous project with an attitude of abject seriousness. His 1994 "modest" proposal plans for the Swiss transit system to be restructured in the shape of a pentagram must be read and studied for their arguable practicability to be believed The chapter on Giger's real-life biomechanical Swatch watches features a joke page that contains 13 types of timepieces ready to made upon commission, the best being *Gigers Watch-Off*, with its acid-filled, ceramic housing to help the wearer's hand "timelessly fall away" And while it's not immediately apparent, the Alien that graces the cover of the book itself is wearing skis (pictured)!

The book concludes with photographs and plans of two Giger works currently underway, both inspired by the artist's original designs for the 1995 movie *Species*. The Garden-Train (now tracking in the artist's backyard) and the Giger-Museum (proposed to be built in the form of a spiral railway in a gutted castle in Gruyère, France) are easily the *biggest* visions that the man has ever attempted to realise Gaudy as it may seem, it's arguable that these works could potentially be the first *physical* step in what promises to be the very long road to actual societal bio-mechanisation. Then again, maybe he just has a different kind of one track mind these days

Regardless of the path that Giger chooses from hereon, there is no doubt that he will travel it on his own terms The greatest irony that emerges from the *Alien: Resurrection* credit farce is that H R Giger is an artist who must now cry out to be evaluated in the limiting terms of his most famous creation, as the world continually fails to consider how much more he actually has to offer Necessity is the mother of invention, but for Giger, it has become the father of insurrection *WWW HR Giger com* paints the true portrait of the man; that this brave book was released only heartbeats ahead of *Alien: Resurrection* borders on tragedy The con before the storm? Certainly And the tip of the proverbial iceberg, too

Keep up the good work, HR In space, no one can hear you scream - but the audience *is* listening

Gary Butler is a company man who thinks that "alienation" should never have been two words long He is currently the editor of Watch *magazine*



Beyond Hollywood: Giger's Alien continues to evolve.



Slaughter in Texas, Take Four

Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The Next Generation
Starring Matthew McConaughey and Renée Zellweger
Directed and written by Kim Henkel

After several years of delays and rumours, the fourth sequel to the infamous *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* is reluctantly being released in video stores near you. The movie was originally scheduled for theatrical release in 1994, but due to its questionable merit and an unforeseen change in the fortune of its two stars, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* fell behind schedule by about four years.

The roller coaster ride began for executive producer Robert Kuhn in 1995, when Columbia





TriStar bought the theatrical and video distribution rights to *The Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre* for $1.35 million. TriStar told Kuhn that the movie would be released in theatres shortly after the release of the Tom Cruise blockbuster *Jerry Maguire*, in order to capitalize on lead Renée Zellweger's newfound popularity in that movie. Later, as it turns out, Matthew McConaughey also landed a supporting role alongside Jodie Foster in *Contact*. For the marketers of *Return*, it made perfect sense to also exploit this unforeseen development.

$500,000 was spent on prints and advertising, and in January 1996, trailers were added to several videos announcing that a release date was imminent. But then 1996 came and went. The return of that nutty chainsaw wielding family would be delayed for several years while actors, agents, studios and producers did battle, Hollywood style.

Off the record, TriStar attributed the delays in 1996 to McConaughey's agent, who purportedly was pressuring the studio to halt *Return*'s theatrical release. Kuhn reportedly dropped an unlikely breach of contract suit against TriStar and turned his legal chainsaw on McConaughey's agency, Creative Artists, for interfering in his contract with the movie company.

To add to Kuhn's worries, the rumour mill began to buzz with stories that suggested the film haunted Zellweger like an unpublished spread in *Playboy*. Reports trickled through that the rising star and her agent were persistently bullying TriStar to drop the film altogether in hopes of preserving Zellweger's as yet untarnished career. Rather than being the convenient marketing concept anticipated, the star-factor in the film had become its nemesis.

But in the end no one could stop the inevitable, which is why you are currently reading this review for the movie, retitled *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* for its long awaited release. Predictably, the controversy surrounding the film is a hell of a lot more noteworthy than the film itself.

A romantic scuffle on prom night leads four unsuspecting teens into the deep dark woods where they meet up with Texas' most inhospitable family. The plot follows the original film, meat hooks, sit-down dinner and all, making it seem more like a re-make than a sequel.

Zellweger plays Jenny, a virginal wallflower and sole survivor, and McConaughey assumes the role of the flesh-hungry brother-in-law to Leatherface. His performance as such is somewhat over-camped, making him one of the least frightening psychopaths of all time. And Leatherface, played by Robert Jacks, seems a little too insecure to be convincing as a blood and guts killer. *Texas Chainsaw: TNG* does give an interesting explanation for the family's remarkable ability to skirt the law but, overall, there really isn't much to be said for this pathetic piece of celluloid.

-MARY-BETH HOLLYER

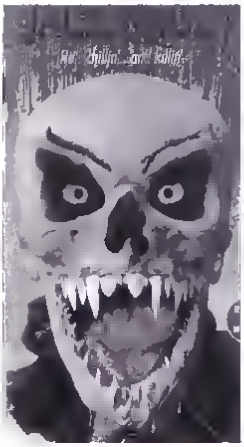
Humour In A Chilled Vein

Jack Frost
Starring Chris Allport and Stephen Mendell
Written and directed by Michael Cooney

I had a little trouble getting into the Christmas spirit, but now that this little film has landed in my VCR, all I need is some nog and the good feelings will start to flow. *Jack Frost* is the story of an infamous serial killer turned rampaging snowman by scientific accident. Late one winter's night, Frost is being sent to execution in a "state execution transfer vehicle" when the impossible happens. Due to unfavourable

weather conditions and a slight comedy of errors between drivers, the vehicle collides with a truck carrying acid that can bond to human genetic material. Logically, Jack's DNA is transferred from his body to take up residence in the snow. Even more mind boggling is that Jack's personality also makes the trip. The scientist responsible for the acid later exclaims, "Do you know what this means? It means the soul exists. The soul is a chemical." Pretty heady stuff... at least for the minute it takes the scientist to explain it.

The rest of the film is comprised of the more humorous elements of a killer snowman. Scott MacDonald is well cast as Jack and his angular features, dark eyes and cutting voice are indispensable for the role of serial killer. And yet, I can't help but think the edge was lost when he was turned into a rollingly fluffy snowman by the moviemakers.



Other cast members will be familiar to fans of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, a quirky, small town attitude provides much of this film's humour. The townsfolk speak of ways to mend linoleum floors, offer 20% off ammo to fight the killer, and even give a neighbour a friendly wave when they see him frantically trying to break free of the killer's grasp.

Jack Frost is unmistakably a B-horror movie, but what sets it apart from the rest are the subtle touches. For example, screenwriter and director Michael Cooney takes care to frame his shots to maximize the laughs. One such scene depicts the sheriff and his two deputies inspecting the body of Jack's first victim. The old man's frozen corpse is seen in the foreground, rocking back and forth in a rocking chair, while the three men talk in the background until the sheriff abruptly commands the deputy to take his foot off the chair.

Cooney also employs plenty of quick camera motion reminiscent of Sam Raimi films, namely the *Evil Dead* series, and the soundtrack is an eclectic collection of re-worked Christmas carols rendered in minor keys and dissonant chords.

In the obligatory teenage sex scene, a striptease version of "The 12 Days of Christmas" plays as the participants ready themselves for what will no doubt be their downfall (see *Scream* review in *Rue Morgue #1*). This scene displays the best graphic violence in the film based on originality versus the blood and guts type. In fact, the film is a little mild on my personal gore scale (but I probably have a problem).

Similarly, a young woman awaits her lover in a bathtub and, as a familiar carrot emerges from the water, she complains it is getting cold, suddenly she is in the clutches of the snowman. Christmas came early, it seems, and Jack enjoys a smoke while reattaching his nose. His post-coital comment is just one in a lengthy series of too conscious efforts to establish Jack Frost as one of the great killers with a penchant for one-liners (cf. Pinhead in *Hellraiser*). All in all, this is a Christmas movie that offers a few gifts to its viewers, but there are some here that you will want to return.

-PETTER QUE

Spanish Zombies Return

Tombs of the Blind Dead
Starring Lone Fleming and Cesar Burner
Return of the Blind Dead
Starring Tony Kendall and Fernando Sanchez
Written and directed by Amando de Ossorio

If Amando de Ossorio can be accused of borrowing heavily from *Night of the Living Dead*, he may be excused for making the resulting film distinctly his own. Which is one of the reasons (we're inclined to think) why the Spanish director's seminal Blind Dead series is being reissued once again, twenty five years after initial release. In case you haven't heard of him, Amando de Ossorio is one of the definitive masters of the Mediterranean horror film, his career spanning some fifteen years beginning with 1971's *Tombs of the Blind Dead*, also known as *The Blind Dead*, *Crypt of the Blind Dead* and *Night of the Blind Dead*.

The titles are pretty much interchangeable to a story that starts off with two old schoolmates, Betty and Virginia, running



into each other at a hotel poolside. Betty is off camping with her friend Roger and, natch, invites her old/new friend to join them. While on a train, Roger shows some excessive affection towards Virginia which upsets Betty (it turns out that the girls had also been lovers during their days in school). But just as the characterization starts kicking in, it's as if Ossorio remembered he had a zombie film to make and promptly got Betty to jump off the train in anger.

She winds up in a deserted Medieval village called Berzano and takes her time — approximately ten minutes of real time — to look around. Long story short, night falls and up rise the animated corpses of 13th Century Templars, who were once murdered for using black magic and human sacrifice in order to achieve immortality. It takes ten more minutes for Betty to get hers since this is a zombie movie, which means that if the corpses aren't walking, they're getting made.



The blueprint of the movie is laid in this initial sequence, and Ossorio seems to follow the motions by getting Roger and Virginia out to Berzano and getting them to die (Roger does, at any rate). Eventually the knights board the train itself and wreak havoc among the terrified passengers until the carnage — knights and all — arrives at the city platform.

Somewhat haunting and sombre in its savage nihilism, *Tombs of the Blind Dead* nevertheless remains a film very much in the comic book mold. It is trite, but there is a lot to be said for this little film, the vengeful blind knights are unsettling in their own way and Ossorio films them with a lot of directorial vision. There are several unforgettable scenes shot in slow motion, where the undead knights are seen galloping on their horses through the foggy crypts, that make for some great visuals. And the blood ritual segment, where a village woman is stabbed and drained of her blood, is certainly daring for its time.

Perhaps the greatest accolade that can be bestowed on the film is that it spawned four sequels, led by the inevitable *Return of the Blind Dead*, also known as *Attack of the Blind Dead* and *Return of the Evil Dead*. The second instalment is likely the weakest of the series (which also includes *Horror of the Zombies* and *Night of the Seagulls*) and recounts the return of the undead knights on the centenary of their death. Logically, vengeance is on the menu and, as the Spanish like to say, it's a dish that's best eaten cold. Unfortunately, the film has neither the suspense nor the atmospheric bite of *Tombs* and, also unlike its predecessor, *Return of the Blind Dead* is dubbed. For those two reasons, this film doesn't come recommended by me, but the director still does.

-EMMA ANDERSON

Wolf Gets Lost in Paris

An American Werewolf in Paris
Starring Julie Delpy and Tom Everett Scott
Directed by Anthony Waller
Written by Tim Burns, Tom Stern, and Anthony Waller

The combination of comedy and horror has been a popular one for years, evidenced with the release of this latest such attempt, which falls short for a number of reasons. In *An American Werewolf in Paris*, worn out plot devices are rife. Adventure-seeking college graduates travel to Paris to live it up but instead find themselves in the middle of monsters and mayhem. As most veteran horror film watchers can infer, it seems likely that at least one of them will meet a gory fate before the film's conclusion.



American Werewolf '98. Worn out plot devices and botched humour.

They encounter a mysterious, beautiful woman named Serafine (Julie Delpy) who leads them down a dark, dangerous path filled with blood, mutilation and, of course, werewolves. As events unfold, one of the naive college boys, Andy (Tom Everett Scott), fails to keep his hormones under check and falls for the French mystery woman. It turns out that Serafine is a werewolf herself, desperate for a cure and willing to experiment with possible solutions.

Unfortunately, Andy gets bitten by a werewolf during a night of carousing and must therefore come to terms with his condition. To make matters worse, Serafine's ex-boyfriend Claude (Pierre Cosso) injects himself with her funky blood in order to transform *himself* into a werewolf. He infects and recruits a number of sociopaths to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting city-dwellers who patronize a local club.

The forced, fumbling acting performances undermine any sense of dramatic tension that might otherwise have been developed and the comic relief often falls flat. Effective fright scenes are almost non-existent; director Anthony Waller's botched attempts to build suspense fail to reach any sort of sustained pitch. Furthermore, in a movie of this sort, one would expect some half-decent special effects, but visual effects supervisor John Grower and his Santa Barbara-based team of technicians prescribe shocks in scattered, uneven doses. It was pretty hard to appre

continued on pg 17



Crypt Makes History
The X-Files Debunked
The Art of Violence

Tales From The Crypt

Digby Diehl

St. Martin's Press

If you're a fan of Chuck Beaumont and Rod Serling, the early Ray Bradbury, Richard Matheson or William Nolan, you would have heard of EC comics, the first bastion of horror in the fifties and — according to those guys — about the only thing worth living for in those days. Closer to home, you'll know EC if you collect MAD magazine or if you know your comics (or your horror). And with it, you will know Tales From the Crypt which, along with Vault of Horror and Haunt of Fear, heralded the very first horror in comic book history.

While *Tales* has all of the stylings of a coffee table book, amazingly enough it actually provides a fairly comprehensive history of the comic and of EC and its staff, especially Bill Gaines, the company's woolly Moses and Al Feldstein, its tireless Michelangelo.

From the reading, which begins with a capsulized history of Gaines' father Max (the inventor of the comic book), a picture emerges of two audacious men who dared the unthinkable. Gaines and Feldstein had the gumption (and the naivete it turns out) to peddle magazines that featured heads severed by axes on their covers in an era ruled by stiff social conduct. While mitigating the severity of the content with simple morality fables and tongue in cheek humour, Tales and its sister publications depicted violence and grotesqueries well beyond the moral fabric of their time.

Logically, therefore, *Tales* also talks about Frederic Wertham (*The Seduction Of The Innocent*) and the Kefauver Hearings, both of whom were equally responsible for halting publication of all three comic books a mere three years after they debuted. The story is now given an ironic corollary, however, in the form of the massive collectible industry which EC has become in the forty years since the trial. Of course, the book also encompasses the inspired HBO show of the same name with an exhaustive guide to the episodes and behind-the-scenes look at the two Tales movies (*Demon Knight* and *Bordello Of Blood*).

And just to make sure the book does not go unnoticed (or unpurchased), author Digby Diehl has included the first ever printing (in its entirety) of EC's *Shock Illustrated #4* which, if you know your EC history, was the last ever issue — destroyed before it could reach the stands.

Tales is also a giant of a book (roughly 9" X 12"), beautifully illustrated and expertly designed with an eye for clarity and composition. And if there is any truth to the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words, then *Tales From The Crypt* is an encyclopedia unto itself. An invaluable item, for fans and historians.

-EMMA ANDERSON

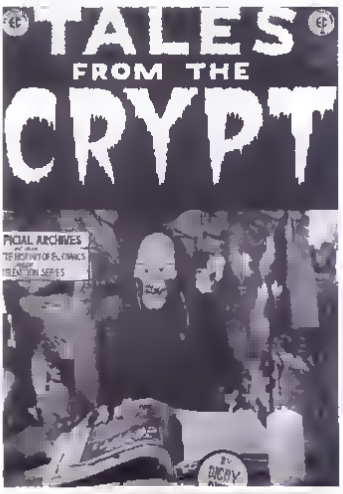
The Nitpicker's Guide For X-Philes

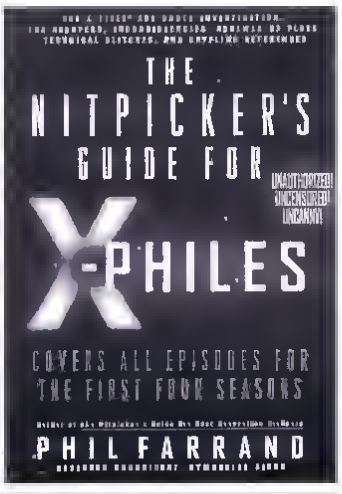
Phil Farrand

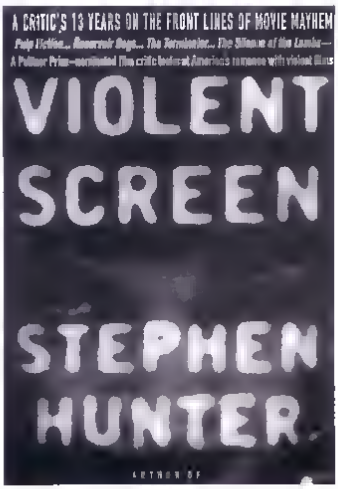
Dell Trade Paperback

Phil Farrand's fifth addition to his series of nitpicker guides requires a large store of willpower if one is not a nitpicker by nature. I confess, thankfully, that I do not endorse nitpicking, this ludicrous pass time in which diehard fans search for inconsistencies and oddities in the plot, equipment and production of *Star Trek* and *X-Files* episodes. However, no measure of willpower can stop Phil Farrand, creator of the music notation program *Finale*, from ripping apart the professional credibility of our favourite sci-fi/suspense shows.

Over the last few years, Farrand has produced five nitpicking guides, four based on *Star Trek* and its many generations, and the







most recent based on the *X-Files*. In the process, he has created a small nitpicking empire on the web (www.nitcentral.com) with a membership of 6499 nerds and growing.

In compiling his latest volume, *The Nitpicker's Guide For X-Philes*, Farrand spent "countless hours" in front of the boob tube searching for mistakes in the production and plot of the show. He then organized his observations by episode, documenting errors involving onscreen location, plot, production and equipment. Each analysis includes a summary of the subject episode and trivia questions. To dress up the product a little, Farrand added several sections dealing with specific themes and statistics on the show.

Sounds interesting, that is, until you take a closer look. Farrand's latest attempt at authorship, to put it bluntly, is neither interesting nor particularly informative. Reading it is like trying to watch TV with a yappy friend — you wish you could just tell him to shut up for a second.

Most of his observations involve unimportant details. For instance, he is obsessed with changes in camera angles, a coffee mug might mysteriously move from one side of Mulder's desk to another, or a character's shirt sleeves might appear rolled in one angle and cuffed in another. Better plot summaries can be found in any of the many guides to the *X-Files*, and the trivia questions are utterly inane. Who cares where Max Fenig fills his prescriptions? Turn to any page, and you will find trivia of the same calibre.

Fortunately, the book is not a total waste of trees. The sections dealing with specific themes and statistics are amusing. The Damage Tote Board, for instance, details statistics such as the number of episodes with decapitated heads (three). The Romance Tote Board looks at Mulder's and Scully's romantic history, documenting Mulder's penchant for erotica and the number of times Mulder and Scully shower together (one).

But still, Farrand's scrutiny of our favourite FBI agents came close to killing my interest in the show. He is particularly critical of Scully's medical skill, noting a few occasions in which Scully diagnosed a patient by just looking at him. To add to her embarrassment, Scully apparently once took a patient's pulse with her thumb. Farrand also attacks Scully's credibility as an FBI agent. She often forgets to cock her gun before firing, and then holds the weapon incorrectly. And I thought this babe was real.

Nitpicking is supposed to be fun, but for people like myself it can only spoil the fun. I do not want to know that Jack's beanstalk could not possibly grow as high as the clouds, and I do not want to know that Mulder misquoted the Bible on several occasions. I prefer to buy into the illusion. If the truth is in Phil Farrand's VCR, I say let it stay there.

-MARY-BETH HOLLYER

Violent Screen

Stephen Hunter

Delta/Dell

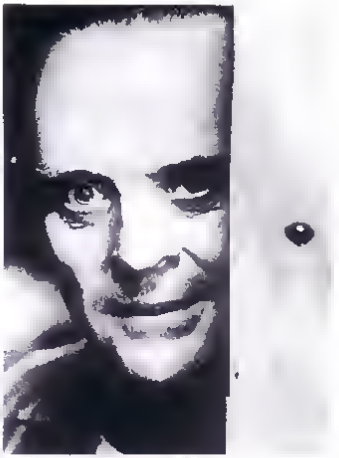
Stephen Hunter is a film critic who has spent 13 years in the trenches faithfully watching — and reporting on — cinematic trends, events and disasters at the box office. You'd recognize Hunter if you happen to be a regular *Baltimore Sun* reader or if you chanced on any of his popular novels at the bookstore. He has garnered a name for himself on a devout work ethic (he purportedly reviews 250 films a year) and on a soundbite that has the power to convey something vital about a movie, usually in less than fifteen words.

He calls *Reservoir Dogs* "the Citizen Kane of the gag reflex" and *Sleeping With The Enemy* "a skimpy, mechanistic manipulation of gooses and shocks to the system." *Blue Velvet*, he says, "combines the narrative structure of Tom Swift Boy Detective with several of the juicier items from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Psychologia Sexualis." Agree or disagree, Hunter's condensed verse seldom fails to achieve profundity in 400 words, a talent that has garnered the author Pulitzer Prize nominations in the past and made him the Mick Jagger of quotable critics.

Which brings us to *Violent Screen*, a collection of *Sun* articles brought together to showcase over a decade of "front line movie mayhem." The book lays out a sumptuous spread, subdividing the cinematic body into film noir, outlaw life, sexual obsession, "true" criminals, horror, wise guys, cops, action adventure, the wild west, the future, war, racism, domestic violence and films that portray violence in such a starkly unique way that they merit a category all their own (in Hunter's words, "lost in hell or some suburb thereof").

Articles and essays, also from the *Sun*, bookend the sections, presumably to bring coherence to an underlying argument about what it is about violence in cinema that's so great or not so great. For Hunter, not surprisingly, the former task seems much easier (and convincing) than the latter.

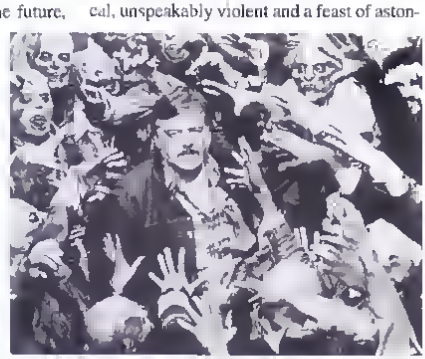
Much of *Violent Screen*'s value, therefore, lies in the author's talent to assess the movies themselves, a job he fulfils with piercing acumen.



Silence of the Lambs: "chocolate candy for the reptile part of the brain."

Hunter is a first rate critic, possessing an encyclopedic knowledge of directors, actors and screenwriters, and an inherent sense of what works and what doesn't work onscreen. His own novelistic interests are well played out in his pages, and they convey the sense of a critic who is familiar with the difficulties of writing for the screen. He is immensely learned in the medium, and like all great critics, is not above getting angry or excited about his subject.

Of particular interest is the chapter on horror ("the moist and ferny jungle of the id") in which Hunter reviews nine films and offers two essays ("History's Psychopathic Killers Paralleled by Film Monsters" and "Horrors! What Are Movies Coming To?"). Again, his critical dissections are informed and informative. *Silence Of The Lambs*, he says, is "chocolate candy for the reptile part of the brain," and *The Stepfather* is "darkly comical, unspeakably violent and a feast of aston-



George Romero: "irascible and infantile" and "an exceedingly competent director."

ishments". He criticizes *Slumber Party Massacre* for its crass utilization of "mild feminist spices" and excuses *Day Of The Dead* on the grounds that while George Romero may be "irascible and infantile," he is also "an exceedingly competent director."

However, Hunter's abilities are compromised as an essayist, much of his commentary amounts to extended reviews or thin attempts to "review" entire genres. There are insights here, but they are incurably technical. Hunter talks about making movies, not about the reasons behind them, or the reasons behind America's infatuation with on-screen violence, something which the book — in title at least — seems to imply.

When it comes to the moment of reflection, he makes his points dutifully, if simplistically. "What is scariest about horror is the concept, not the spectacle." He ends up agreeing with Stephen King that "horror stories and movies must work the way any story or movie works." It isn't the moment of epiphany we could have hoped for, but it's still true.

-ROD GUDINO

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continued from pg 14

hend exactly what was taking place within a given scene and there is little originality evident in the way Grower approaches his art.

Frankly, the special effects in *An American Werewolf in London* (produced 16 years ago), are much more effective in their ability to evoke terrified awe from the audience. Sure, when a horror film fails to sustain interest in its plot it can sometimes succeed through its plastic appearance, but *An American Werewalf in Paris* does neither. If the werewolf sub-genre is still kicking, you wouldn't know from watching this film.

-DAN ZACHARIAH

Scream and Scream Again

Scream 2
Starring David Arquette, Neve Campbell and Courteney Cox
Directed by Wes Craven
Written by Kevin Williamson

Love it or loathe it, few can deny that *Scream* has already had a tremendous influence on horror films. Directed by veteran Wes Craven and written by ingenue Kevin Williamson, *Scream* was one of the surprise hits of 1996 and became one of the highest grossing horror films of all time. No surprise then that Hollywood has jumped back on board the terror train as evidenced by this past year's more than average creepy crop (among which Williamson's own *I Know What You Did Last Summer* also proved to be a smash success).

It should also come as no surprise that *Scream 2* was recently unleashed upon a less than unsuspecting world. What is surprising, however, is that the sequel retained Craven and Williamson and manages to be as good, if not better, than its predecessor.

Scream 2 opens up two years after the events of *Scream* and reunites the film's survivors, tabloid reporter-cum-author Gale Weathers (Courteney Cox), deputy Dewey (David Arquette), geek no-more Randy (Jamie Kennedy) and gutsy heroine Sidney (Neve Campbell).

It appears that Gale has been busy these past couple of years writing a book based on the first film's events, called "Stab." Stab is now a major motion picture, and amidst all the publicity hoopla, a new killer — with the same fashion sense and penchant for knives as the old — has emerged to disrupt Sidney's new college life (not to mention the lives of her friends).

Scream 2 has a much grander scale than the previous outing (due, no doubt, to a higher budget), the murders are more elaborate, more creative and more brutal, and the body count is considerably higher. However, it also retains the themes and eccentricities which made *Scream* so enjoyable. The pace, for example, is just as relentless, with the killer striking at the most inopportune times. Daylight, night time, inside, outside, home or away, this is a killer who does not discriminate or follow a set pattern. Nowhere is safe, a fact which contributes tremendously to some of the film's best shocks.



Who screams last: Sarah Michelle Gellar in what could be a better sequel.

Scream 2 also continues the tradition of poking fun at, but never demeaning, other horror films, including its predecessor. Some of the best scenes include brief glimpses of Stab, a hilarious and telling commentary on Hollywood's mentality toward the genre. In fact, one gets so caught up in Stab's re-telling of key sequences from *Scream* that it's easy to forget you're watching a product of that same system, albeit a far superior one.

But if *Scream 2* shares many of *Scream*'s strengths, it also, unfortunately, shares some of its weaknesses. Logic is still somewhat strained at times and the climactic revelation, while a nice homage to another successful horror film, is as hard to swallow as the first film's is. However, this is — thankfully — not enough to detract from a brilliant script and strong performances throughout.

Scream 2 has proven to be a box-office, as well as a critical success, and is sure to revive much interest in horror sequels as the first *Scream* did for slasher material. *Last Summer*'s next chapter is currently being readied and *Exarcist IV* and *Halloween VII* are in preparation. Meanwhile, Williamson has announced that he will script *Scream 3*. If he does half as good a job on the first sequel, it should prove to be just as successful. Yes, it's a good time to be a horror fan.

-PEDRO CABEZUELO

Classic Cut

Suspiria

(1977, Italy)
Starring Jessica Harper, Stefania Casini and Flavio Bucci
Directed by Dario Argento
Written by Dario Argento and Daria Nicolodi
Based on the novel Suspiria de Profundis *by Thomas De Quincey*

The current revival of Wicca and other forms of socially acceptable witchery would probably prevent Dario Argento's phenomenal, shudderingly original *Suspiria* to capture audiences the way it did in 1977. And yet there is a lot about this piercing, surreal istically malevolent film that outshines its time and place, such that film critics who have happened onto it have remarked at its unconditional impact and terrible efficiency. "This film will terrify horror fans," was the predominant line.



A gory climax to a film that otherwise showcases narrative subtlety and lush cinematic style.

It's easy to see how such a comment could come about. Argento made *Suspiria* eight years into his career as a professional filmmaker. He was, at the time, just flushed with his first success, the eerie and cryptic *Profondo Rosso* (*Deep Red*), a film which still strained at the ropes of its director's amateur style despite having a lot of fright power to its credit. For Argento, frightening an audience — genuinely frightening them — was his professional aim, and one that he strove to perfect right from his first feature effort, 1969's *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage*. The honing of that skill, principally through the devices of mystery and gore, can be seen in his work leading up to and including *Suspiria*.

The film has become infamous for its opening sequence, which depicts the brutal murder of a woman at the hands of an unseen killer (except for the hands, but more on that later). The sequence is a grisly introduction to a film that, uncharacteristically for Argento at any rate, revels more in the tension of suspense rather than gore.

It turns out that the murdered woman was one of the many skinny ballet dancers at the academy at which Susie Banyon (Jessica Harper) has enlisted. Later, Susie recalls having encountered the woman on the night she arrived at the school, just prior to the murder it turns out. The chance meeting begins to take on more significance once a fellow dancer (Sara) begins to voice concerns about the school's sinister teachers. Thus, after the initial sequence, we are given a different mystery to follow, rather than finding the killer's identity, we want to know the secret behind the school.

Argento embellishes his mystery by giving us a few red herrings in the form of a natural if exaggerated infestation of worms and a sinister principal who is never seen but only heard. Little by little, he turns his odd ballet school into a nightmarish, foreboding place and hints that the killer — natural or supernatural — also resides within its walls.

Not surprisingly, part of the brilliance of the film lies in Argento's slow unravelling of the yarn and particularly in his narrative decision to keep the ultimate threat hidden while increasing the sense of its deadliness and malevolent intent.

When Susie and Sara deduce, after listening to the teacher's footsteps echoing off the corridors at night, that they are in fact receding into the building rather than withdrawing from it, the stage is set for the new student to find the truth in the empty school, the night her classmates go off to a dance.

Argento put a lot of original work into *Suspiria*; besides having a hand at adapting Thomas De Quincey's novel for the screen, he also oversaw the music for the film, written and recorded by the band Goblin. As with John Carpenter's *Halloween*, *Suspiria*'s score is indispensable to the film's overall impact. Through the music Argento's invisible killer becomes omnipresent, a fact that was not lost to the director, who played the score on set to elicit raw performances from his actors during key sequences.

Most importantly, *Suspiria* is a showcase for Argento's increasingly lavish cinematic style. Bright colours taint the screen and isolate characters and objects in the booming darkness of the school. It is the collective effect of these relatively simple ideas that charge *Suspiria* with visceral horror unlike anything seen on the screen before. Of course, the movie's denouement is accompanied with a kind of violence that explains why the movie is widely regarded as one of the crowning achievements of splatter cinema.

One last thing: the killer's hands, they are Argento's own, as they are in all his films. It's a practice he refuses to discuss in interviews and which has elicited a few theories as to the motivations behind this profoundly intriguing director. We make the point here merely to state that, in *Suspiria*, the hands are the only thing we *ever* see. Perhaps Argento realized that this was the ultimate horror.

-Rod Gudino

"Moving and disturbing and beautiful all at once." - *Clive Barker*

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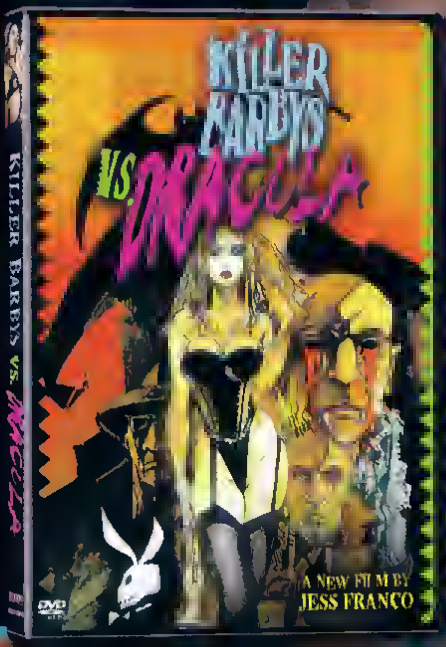
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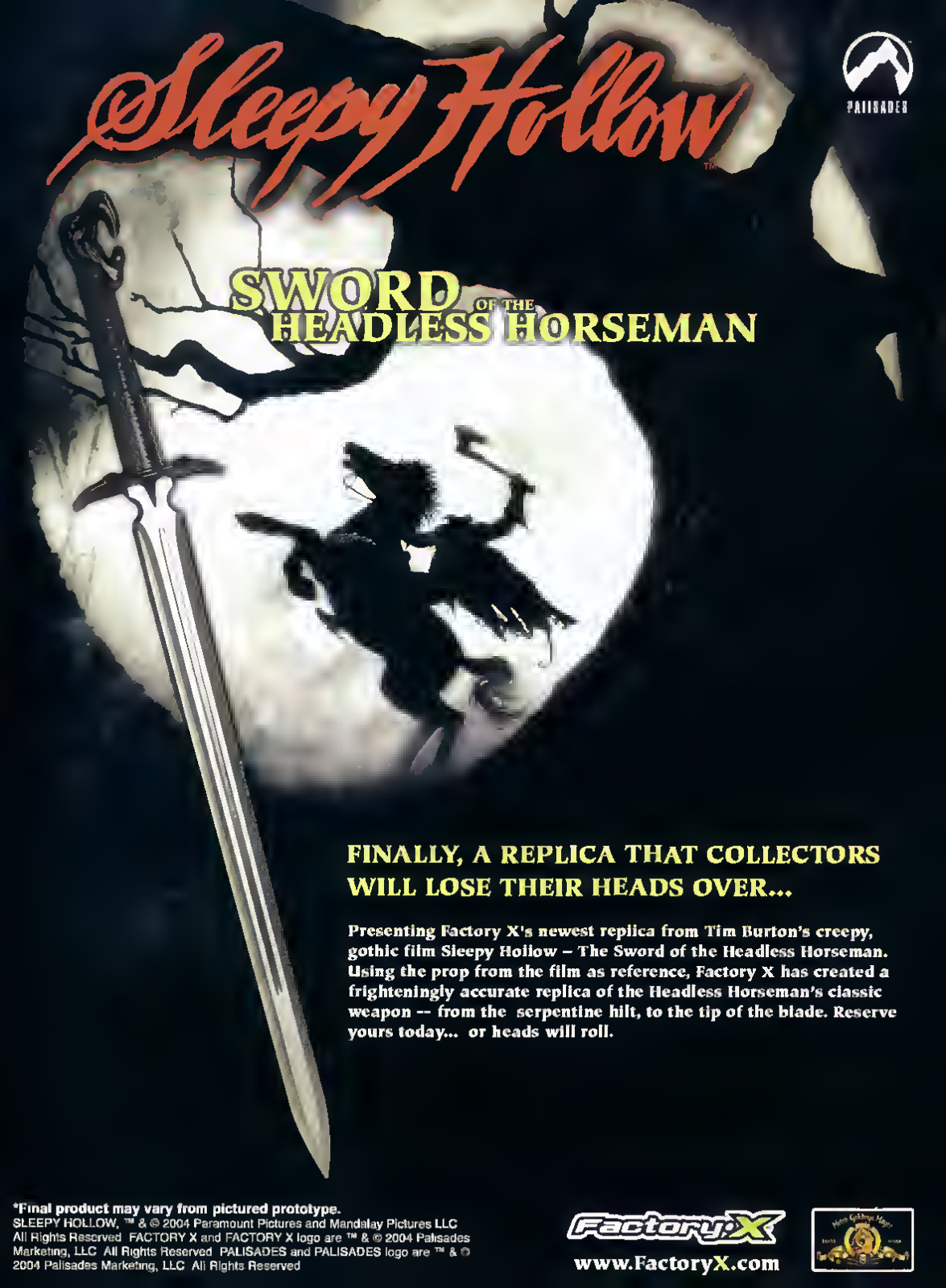




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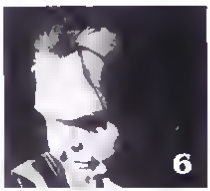
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Note From Underground

#3

When the general public conceives of horror, chances are that splatter films come to mind. This is a point worth noting, not only because it reveals a lot about what the mass culture understands what horror aims to be about, but because it is a testament to the ongoing popularity of this relatively new sub-genre.

Splatter did not in fact begin with cinema but with theatre, specifically the Grand Guignol theatre of early twentieth century Paris, France (so named after the revenge-driven puppet shows of the same name). As the first instance of splatter and a precursor to its offshoots in film, Grand Guignol established the movement's sole operating principle: to mortify audiences by any means possible. Thus, from its beginnings, splatter concerned itself with spectacle and aligned itself as a form of entertainment with affinities to the circus rather than the novel. Because the moving picture medium was severely restricted in what it could show when its commercial popularity initially flourished, it was a long time before it could incorporate the success of the Grand Guignol for itself. But, oh, how it tried.

It struggled through the fifties with monster movies, in the sixties with gangster movies and westerns and in the seventies with war films and a host of psychological urban horrors, every one which tread one step away from the stage of the dramatic playwright and closer to the theatre of the Grand Guignol. Finally, in 1973, we were treated to splatter's first commercial breakthrough, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist*, a film which held dear to traditional narrative and cinematic devices while labouring to repulse its audience.

The Exorcist had a host of notable actors, an impressive budget and a lot of directorial savvy, but what secured its success was the lacerated, vomit-soaked figure of a demon possessed twelve-year-old girl lying on her bed. In this sense, *The Exorcist* was identical in its effects to the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis, who had at that time established Grand Guignol in the undercurrent of Hollywood's B-movie scene, and independent filmmakers like Wes Craven and Sean Cunningham, who were struggling to give violence the still invisible brutal dimension with offerings like *Last House on the Left*.

With the cork popped, it wasn't long before splatter burst into the scene big time with a host of kill orgies like *Friday the 13th*, *My Bloody Valentine* and *The Prowler*, films which were pornographic in their depiction of violence and their attention to grisly detail. What made splatter so special was that violence was not merely a preferred narrative element, it *was* the narrative, in toto.

Not surprisingly, it is often argued that splatter films are an obscenity, the deformed step-brother of the commercial genres so to speak. In fairness, there is some truth to that statement, though the obscenity of these films is not in their insatiate desire for blood, but in their desire to make a spectacle at the expense of everything else.

It's no news that splatter has already made its transition into mainstream film; overall movies are gorier and more explicitly violent than ever before. But beyond that, the legacy of splatter has gone deeper, evidenced most plainly in wave after wave of big budget releases — films like *Die Harder*, *Air Force One* and *Con Air*. Spectacle, not anything else, are what drive these films. Perhaps Hollywood itself is in the midst of its own great age of splatter.

-RG

RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE
HORROR IN CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

199 Avenue Road #534
Toronto ON
M5R 2J3 - CANADA
Phone: 416-964-6657
E-Mail: morgue@istar.ca
URL: http://home.istar.ca/~morgue

Publisher & Editor
ROD GUDINO

Associate Editor
MARY-BETH HOLLYER

Production Assistance
SEAN LaROSE

Contributors
EMMA ANDERSON
GARY BUTLER
PEDRO CABEZUELO
DINA NIKOLIS
SEAN PLUMMER
DALE L. SPROULE
DAN ZACHARIAH

Rue Morgue Online
RODNEY BODA

RUE MORGUE #3
would not have been possible
without the valuable assistance of:

RODNEY BODA
SEAN LaROSE
AL McMULLAN
DALE L. SPROULE

SPECIAL THANKS TO
ALAN ALDERTON
GREG FIZZARD
ROGER GUDINO
DAVID B. SILVA
RAGNA STAMM'LER
STRAWMAN
JOHN VAN RIJS

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Cover: Still from *Night of the Living Dead* (1990)

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RUE MORGUE MAGAZINE #3
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PRINTED IN CANADA



R.I.P.
Issue #3 February/March 1998

POST-MORTEM

Questions Comments Criticism

Circulation

Last week's *Hellnotes* newsletter carried an article about the new *Rue Morgue Magazine*. Nice to see something like this being done here in Canada. The article said that it's free and being distributed at various points in the Toronto area. Any plans to have it distributed by book/comic stores in the Ottawa area?

Hope things go well for you
Brad Hutchings
Ottawa, ON
hutchib@tc.gc.ca

A few things. The magazine is no longer free simply because the economics of it weren't balancing out. However, we are presently looking into Canada wide distribution and expect some coast to coast availability by the summer.

I'm a long-time horror fan and I was very pleased with your second issue of *Rue Morgue Magazine*. I thought your editorial on genres was very insightful and intelligent. I don't think that horror in general has gotten the kind of attention it deserves, not by a long shot. A question, will you be featuring more horror art in the future or will you be going towards movies?

Looking forward to #3,
Caroline Algaron
Toronto

Yes, we will be featuring a lot more horror art in the future, but we also plan to be very aggressive with film (both new releases and re-releases). Same goes for books, comic books, games and music.

Uncredited Potter

I'm a Toronto horror writer and illustrator who discovered *Rue Morgue* #2 at a Yonge St. comics shop the other day. A bit light on it, but very impressive. One thing I found ironic was that an issue with a feature story about uncredited use of Giger's artwork, you don't seem to have any credits for the JK Potter piece on the editorial page. Perhaps you have permission from Potter to use an uncredited illo, but I thought I'd mention it in case it's just an oversight. I wish you continued success with *Rue Morgue* and keep up the great work (unfortunately your web page was under construction when I just checked).

Yours,
Dale L. Sproule
Sproule_McBride@compuserve.com

Thank you for your feedback on Rue Morgue. *We are still new on the market and are finding any commentary we get really helpful in terms of honing down the magazine. Regarding your comment that we're a little light on it, do you mean text or fiction? If the former, it's really a matter of pages (#2 was our second promotional copy); if the latter, the decision not to publish fiction was very deliberate.*

The 'By Bizarre Hands' piece by Potter was not credited as an oversight on production day. We're working to keep these type of errors to a minimum.

The Blind Dead

I am a hard, hard, hard-core horror fanatic since I sprung from the loins, I guess. I don't remember when it started or how it started but I'm a walking encyclopedia of the stuff. You always get the feeling that you are the only one that is naturally obsessed, it's you against the world kind of thing. I walked into Siren today to see what's what and I picked up your magazine. And man, to see a review of *Tombs of the Blind Dead* actually written well and with passion and with fairness, not like in one of those Leonard Maltin-type books where you see a turkey beside it or something. Anyway, to make a long story short, your magazine really wowed me, it was really refreshing to see. It made me really excited and I almost walked into a car reading it. I don't know what else to say, great magazine, keep it up.

Chris Alexander
Toronto

Thanks for your reviews of *Tombs of the Blind Dead* and *Return of the Blind Dead*. Just for the record, all existing 'original language' prints and pre-print materials for *Return* are severely edited. The only way to deliver this film in its entirety is dubbed in English.

Just thought your readers would find this tidbit interesting.

Sincerely,
Jay Douglas
Anchor Bay Entertainment

Misfits Misprint?

It was interesting to see an article on The Misfits in your horror magazine (page 6 of *Rue Morgue* #2). I found this article to be generally insightful and informative but I have to take issue with Emma Anderson's statement that The Misfits' music ("a generic form of hardcore punk") in her words), was secondary to the success of the group. The Misfits have a legion of fans that would take issue with that statement as well. One of the reasons The Misfits are so heavily covered by other bands is that their music is unique and hard hitting, not like the usual punk and hardcore stuff.

Brian Kimsey
Toronto

LETTERS POLICY

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to *morgue@istar.ca* or POST-MORTEM c/o Rue Morgue Magazine, 199 Avenue Road #534, Toronto ON M5R 2J3 - CANADA

Dreadlines

News Highlights From the World of Horror

Chum TV gives go-ahead to Lexx, debuts Nowhere Man

Halifax' Salter Street Films International, in association with CHUM Television in Toronto, has announced that last year's pilot for *Lexx: The Dark Zone Stories* is being turned into a serial. The 20 one-hour programs will premiere in Canada in the Fall of 1998 with subsequent broadcasts throughout the country, and producers are working to nail down syndication in the US.

"We're thrilled to be involved in the production of such a raw, edgy, original Canadian dramatic series," commented Jay Switzer, Vice President of Programming for CHUM Television. "Paul Donovan and the Salter Street group have shown that they're not afraid of controversy. This is a fiercely independent series that will no doubt expand the creative envelope."

Based on the four two-hour TV movies broadcast throughout North America and known to US audiences as *Lexx: Tales From A Parallel Universe*, the new series will continue the darkly weird, edgy, and sexy intergalactic voyage of the Lexx, a dragonfly-shaped bug about the size of Manhattan that has been genetically altered to be used both as a spaceship and as the most destructive weapon in two universes. Described by the Canadian press as a bizarre mixture of horror, comedy and science fiction, *Lexx: The Dark Zone Stories* will continue to be written and directed by Paul Donovan (*Def-Con 4*) and co-produced by the TiMe Film und TV Produktion of Germany.

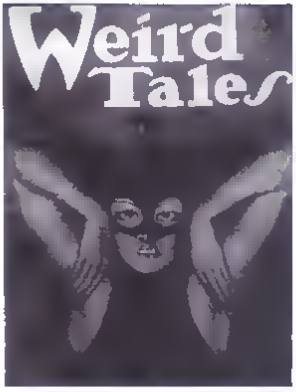
The 2-hour pilot of a new psychological suspense drama titled *Nowhere Man* will be premiering on CHUM's Space Channel on Thursday, April 9 at 8:00pm (5:00pm PT). The show, which is being touted as a mind-bending psycho-thriller, deals with Thomas Veil, a documentary photographer whose identity is suddenly mysteriously erased one night. Veil soon embarks on an all-consuming mission to uncover the perpetrators behind the twisted game his life has rapidly become.

Nowhere Man is being described as a cross between *The Twilight Zone* and *The Prisoner* and stars Bruce Greenwood as Thomas Veil. The series moves to its regular timeslot on Thursdays at 9:00pm (6:00pm PT), beginning April 16, with repeats on Saturdays at 7:00pm (4:00pm PT).



Bruce Greenwood is Thomas Veil in CHUM TV's new thriller, *Nowhere Man*

Weird Tales to be exhumed -- again



A classic issue circa 1933

North America's original horror literary magazine has been raised from the ashes yet again, this time by DNA Publishing, who purchased it from Terminus Publishing several years ago and promptly changed the magazine's name to *Worlds of Fantasy and Horror*.

The magazine, which debuted in North America on March of 1923, was instrumental in the rise of pulp horror throughout three decades into the fifties, and is the publication credited with launching the careers of authors like H.P. Lovecraft, Fritz Leiber, August Derleth, Robert Bloch and Ray Bradbury. It experienced a rocky history after its golden age period, however, and has discontinued publishing on more than one occasion.

Not surprisingly, DNA reported that the numbers being sold declined significantly after the magazine changed its name. DNA's Warren Lapine, who will be overseeing the resurrected publication with WOF&H editors George Scithers and Darrell Schweitzer, expects the new *Weird Tales* to hit stands this summer.

"I'm extremely proud and excited to be able to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of *Weird Tales* by bringing the name back into the publishing arena," commented Lapine. "And I'm looking forward to taking *Weird Tales* into the next millennium. I understand the importance of the title and I plan to publish it with the dignity, respect and honour that it deserves."

Early peek at new Frights

Don Hutchison has just filled the newest instalment of Northern Frights, which has become one of the foremost horror fiction anthologies showcasing Canadian talent. Northern Frights 5, out on Mosaic Press, is expected to hit shelves in the Fall and will feature fiction by a strong cross-section of Canadian horror writers including Robert Charles Wilson, David Nickle, Nancy Kilpatrick and Dale L. Sproule.



Chucky to wed in Toronto?

MGM Film Distribution is keeping a tight lip on the upcoming production of the tentatively titled *Bride of Chucky*, set to begin principal photography this month in Toronto. The film will be the fourth instalment in the Child's Play series that began in 1988 about a knife wielding doll possessed by the soul of a dying criminal. Our prediction is that if producers don't go for the "humour in a jugular vein" angle (a la *Prom Night III*), they'll end up with the dog of the year on their hands. Taking into account that we're talking about commercial horror film here, that's about as low as you can get. We'll keep you posted.

Whispers of M.R. James in new Ash-Tree anthology

British Columbia-based Ash Tree Press, which culled the World Fantasy Award after only two years in business, will be releasing their newest hard-bound limited-edition offering, a collection of ghost stories by new British author Steve Duffy. An information technology professional, Duffy is based in North Wales and has been writing for pleasure for several years in a variety of genres, but was drawn in particular to the ghost story format after reading the works of M.R. James. Called *The Night Comes On*, the collection will pay homage to the tradition of James' ghost stories and continue to expose Duffy's talents, first seen in *Midnight Never Comes*, Ash-Tree's ghost story anthology of yesteryear.

Ash-Tree's Christopher Roden, who also heads the Ghost Story Society in British Columbia along with wife Barbara (she heads an Arthur Conan Doyle Society of her own) says the publishing house will continue its commitment to contemporary stories in the vein of classical supernatural fiction. *The Night Comes On* is, once again, a limited edition release (hard-cover, 300 pages retailing at CAN $51 and available worldwide), and Roden expects it will sell-out approximately 18 months after its April 1 publication date.

Canadian documentary visits Mexican dead

El Dia, La Noche y Los Muertos, a new documentary chronicling Mexico's Day of the Dead festival is causing a stir following a highly attended premiere in Toronto. Director Steve Mykolyn's short half-hour film captures the traditional event — roughly the Mexican equivalent of Halloween — in a highly evocative narrative and sequence of images.

The short, half-hour film follows the Mexican custom of embracing death by mimicking it in costume and art. *El Dia, Lo Noche y Los Muertos* takes the viewer through several small Mexican towns, documenting the villagers' annual journey to the cemetery where they pay homage to the dead by decorating graves with flowers, food, candles and other objects. Joaquin Ortiz, a Mexican actor and theatre director, performs the role of Death, demonstrating the culture's attitude towards the final resting bed through historical anecdotes. These vignettes are coloured by a fanciful radio broadcast leading up to the night.

The highly acclaimed documentary was recently featured at Toronto's Hot Docs Festival and has been nominated for best cinematography in both the Boston and Chicago film festivals. Mykolyn is currently ironing out a distribution deal, so keep an eye out for this film in festival theatres near you.



Annaleura Diazin *El Dia, La Noche y Los Muertos*

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Long celebrated and vilified as splatter cinema's dark engineer, special effects wizard Tom Savini proudly yet reluctantly upholds one of horror's bloodiest traditions.

TOM SAVINI

Memoirs of a Reluctant Assassin

by Rod Gudino



Two Savini moments: finalaa from *The Prowlar* and (big picture) *Maniac.*

Horror in cinema has always been an elaborate artistic affair From the earliest movies, filmmakers were in the habit of employing all manner of devices — storyline, plot, pacing, mood, atmosphere — to artificially instill fear in their audiences and to sustain or relieve it at will No easy task, and one that naturally developed into a vocabulary of devices which became standard as filmmakers gradually honed down the craft of making people jump Interestingly, the rise of the so-called splatter films was marked by a rejection of these concerns, partly because splatter filmmakers became enamoured with the notion of realism which, in the early 1970s, was kicking into gear big time in American cinema

Splatter's love affair with realism — or in its case grim realism — allowed its filmmakers to effect a philosophical shift in the way they approached their craft rather than employing ever sophisticated techniques for conveying experiences of horror, they chose to make their films an experience of horror itself Shock, not fear, was the order of the day and as audiences slowly picked up on this new vocabulary, filmmakers found they had to get increasingly more outrageous to keep fans coming back

The idea found its logical extent in the notion of a snuff movie, a piece of ultimate cinema verite in which the actual killing of the "cast" comprised the plot. Splatter went on to mimic (and sometimes bill itself as) snuff, and in the process further distanced itself from commercial film As with snuff, killing remained at the cherished centre of the splatter film and more often than not concentrated on violence through the murder of female victims (usually), whose meticulous disembowelments were ravenously caught by the camera eye. Because the event of killing was so central to these films, the technical art of special effects rose to extreme prominence within the genre and

even occasioned — for the very first time — a film star of a different sort: the special effects man.

Tom Savini is perhaps the first such star and certainly the most well known to date. Inspired by the acting and effects versatility of Lon Chaney, he went on to trace a career of special effects that made him a key figure in the development of American splatter cinema. Although he did not conceive the films themselves (as he points out in the interview following), Savini brought a clinical precision to his effects that quickly singled him out as a visionary and made him the foremost make-up technician the genre ever employed. Gore being at the dramatic centre of splatter, Savini soon took principal billing and became the chief draw with viewers as they became more discriminating in their tastes for blood and guts.

In 28 years, Savini worked on over 20 splatter films, a relatively high number taking into account the rapid rise and decline of the form in American cinema. More importantly, he worked in many of the genre's classic releases; films like *The Burning*, *Friday the 13th* (Pts. 1 and 4), *Maniac*, *The Prowler*, and *Creepshow* (1 and 2), some of which did little else but showcase Savini's technical mastery at depicting scenes of explicit carnage.

While he has slowed his filmmaking activity (which presently centres more around acting), Savini is still remembered, and celebrated, as the father of the modern gore effect. And because gore has now become an accepted part of non-splatter cinema (and even slipped into commercial cinema — see below), Savini continues to have relevance for modern filmgoers and filmmakers.

He was a co-creator of the Spooky World Horror Theme Park in Boston and a consultant for Universal Studios Florida Horror Make-Up Show, his two books, *Grande Illusions I* and *II* are considered seminal works in the field, the latter enjoying six reprints. In 1995, he was asked by long-time fan Quentin Tarantino to star in *From Dusk Till Dawn*, the director's official debut into horror. A popular, if notorious figure, Savini has also been a five time guest on *Late Night with David Letterman* and the host and narrator of endless documentaries on horror and the art of special effects. He spoke to *Rue Morgue* in January of this year, following a British tour in support of *Savini: The Wizard of Gore*, a new book chronicling his career, released by the UK-based Midnight Media publishing firm.

What sorts of projects are you involved with currently?

I've gotten a lot of offers. You know what it is? It's a lot of promises, but no contracts. The closest I've gotten is something coming up called *Vampirate*. That's the closest of all the things that I've been offered that I think we're actually going to gear up and do.

Is this going to be a splatter film?

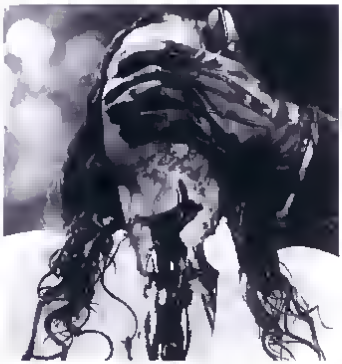
No, it's a comedy but there is going to be some gore there obviously. After all, my name is on it. It's a comedy horror movie.

Are you still actively involved in doing effects for films?



Savini's work often went beyond filmmakers' expectations. From *The Burning*.

"It's always only a movie."



Savini has called his effects for *Maniac* the goriest he has ever created.

Well, my company makes money three ways; me as an actor, me as a director and me doing special effects. Whatever pops up I'll do it.

Where is most of your work coming from these days though? Is it still the effects stuff?

Lately it's been the acting, after *From Dusk Till Dawn* I got signed on to do a movie called *Demolitionist*. As a special effects guy, I have to show up with a crew of people, trucks and cases, but as an actor you walk in naked and you get everything you need. They dress you, they feed you, they make you up. I'm getting kind of spoiled with that so I'm leaning more towards acting. But recently a friend came into town and did a movie called *Assassination File* which I ended up doing the effects on, so really I work with whatever pops up.

I know Night Of The Living Dead *is old news but it still stands as your sole directorial feature. Were you pleased with it?*

No.

Why not?

Well, the film is I'd say about 40% of what I wanted to do. They kept cutting stuff before we shot it and then the rating board chopped it to shreds and it ended up being a very sterile movie. It was the worst nightmare in my life shooting it, I received no help. Friends — I wouldn't say friends — that were supposed to come through for me didn't. To tell you the truth, I don't think I've done my first film yet.

When splatter films came under attack, you were singled out as one of the chief culprits. Do you feel that you still have to justify your past work in any way?

No, because I don't like the stuff. I'm not saying that people who do are sick or demented or they should be committed. My job is to recreate what's in the script as realistically as possible, and that's what I've done. If I'm getting any flack it's not really







"...my stuff is very realistic, but the subject matter is really someone else's ballgame."

getting to the core of the thing, you know? I get e-mail from people saying that I love gore and hey, I create what the script says as realistically as possible. I've done a lot of films that were not horror, such as *Invasion USA*, *Maria's Lovers*, *Killing Zoe* — I mean, they're not monstrous gore fests. My name — I'm the Wizard of Gore, ok — but I didn't give myself that name. I didn't choose it and put it onto everybody, that's just what I've been called. I think it's because my stuff is very realistic, but the subject matter is really someone else's ballgame.

So you're saying that in one sense you are merely a hired hand and you are simply bringing other people's visions to life.
Right.

Purely on the grounds of doing your job, however, has your work ever bothered you morally?
No, not really because I've never done anything that I had a problem with. Like for example I'd never do stuff involving children. Unfortunately, most of the stuff happens to women, I think *Maniac* totally depicted women as victims of someone who could really exist out there, you know, a creepy guy that's going around killing women. But there are movies like *Starship Troopers* where it's big bucks chopping everybody up. They got away with murder, literally, they got away with showing so much stuff because it's already been done. Also, people don't realize how much sculpture and mechanics go into creating this horror stuff, it's not just foam rubber that you splash blood on, everything of mine is anatomically correct. But morally I've never done anything that would bother me. But I mean, come on, when you walk into a theatre, it's always only a movie. And there are movies that bother me more than the stuff I've done.

Like what?
Like *Last House On The Left*. I will never see that movie again in my life.

Is it really that disturbing?
Well, there's something about it, you know. But you see those two directors [Sean Cunningham and Wes Craven], those guys have gone out and made a bundle from stuff like that.

Is there any truth to the theory that splatter films are socially unhealthy, that they have actively contributed to a rise in social violence?
George Romero once said that violence in films diffuse the tendency towards violence within a person and I basically agree with that. It's the same thing with pornography -- it's a release for people who are not roman-

Shotguns, machetes, arrows: Killing, in any of its possible forms, remains at the cherished centre of the splatter film. All effects by Savini.

S A V I N I

CURRICULUM MORTIS:



d-director a-actor m-make-up

Feature Films
Alone in the Dark (m)
Bloodsucking Pharoahs in Pittsburgh (m)
The Burning (m)
Creepshow (m)
Creepshow 2 (a)
Cutting Moments (advisor)
Dawn of the Dead (m/a)
Day of the Dead (m)
Deathdream (m)
The Demolitionist (a)
Deranged (m)
Effects (m/a)
Eyes Are Upon You (a)
Eyes of a Stranger (m)
Friday the 13th (m)
Friday the 13th - The Final Chapter (m)
From Dusk Till Dawn (a)
Heartstopper (m/a)
Innocent Blood (a)

tically involved with anyone in their lives They become voyeurs and it becomes a release and diffuses them so to speak

Are you saying that fans are drawn to splatter films because they are diffusing a tendency to be violent?
Well no, not necessarily But it can work that way for those who do have those tendencies, so it can be a positive thing

Has splatter gone out of style?
It goes in cycles, it always has gone in cycles You've got scary monsters, you've got gore fests and then you've got the psychological terror And that [progression] has happened two or three times as long as I've been around. I mean, I'm 51 and in my life I've seen the Hammer films, Herschell Gordon Lewis and then *The Haunting* and films like that. Then the monsters came back, *Alien*, *Predator*, and then the gore fests were around — I had a great deal to do with that — and the psychological terrors came in after, movies like *Unlawful Entry*, *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, etc Then comes *Scream*, which is a splatter fest again So it's always in cycles and this is part of the cycle

So you don't see horror moving in any new direction?
I think with the computer generated stuff, horror is definitely moving into that realm. I saw *An American Werewolf In Paris* and I thought it was good, but I had difficulty seeing or believing that the wolf existed because I kept seeing the guy at the keyboard creating them with CGI Same thing with *Jurassic Park* and *Lost World*. I had to go two or three times before I actually saw dinosaurs, but I had to change my mindset to see them I had to say to myself, 'ok, every-



Herschell Gordon Lewis and the Dawn of Splatter

In 1963, a one-time University of Mississippi English professor produced, directed, photographed and scored the very first splatter film in movie history. Tellingly titled *Blood Feast*, this low-brow, low-budget cinematic blood-bath hit its mark dead on it was panned by critics, mauled by censor boards across North America and secured its creator a place in the pantheon of filmmakers least likely to work in Tinsel Town. It also became the biggest success in the career of one Herschell Gordon Lewis

Initially a maker of soft-core sex films, Lewis found himself in dire need of a change when he saw that the Hollywood mainstream had begun experimenting with nudity and simulated sex Along with partner David Friedman, he fought to maintain his livelihood as an independent filmmaker by pushing the envelope further than he had in the past

"There were a whole series of taboos that I deliberately set out to violate," Lewis once commented in an interview "We couldn't match production values and we didn't have name actors or actresses What could we do, then, to justify our pictures? The answer was that we could provide effects, however crudely drawn, that nobody else would dare do "

Lewis envisioned a new kind of pornography, one that was rooted in violence rather than sex, that conveniently sidestepped his limited abilities as a filmmaker through raw, explicit visuals. His

continued on pg 12

Invasion USA (m)
Killing Zoe (m)
Knightriders (a)
Maniac (m/a)
Maria's Lovers (m)
Martin (m/a)
Midnight (m)
Monkey Shines (m)
Necronomicon (m)
Night of the Living Dead (d)
Nightmare (advisor)
The Prowler (m)
Red Scorpion (m)
Scared To Death/Till Death Do Us Part (m)
The Ripper (a)
Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (m)
Trauma (m)
Two Evil Eyes (m/a)

Television
Mr. Stitch (m/a)
Out of the Shadows (a)
Tales From the Darkside·
Family Reunion (m/d)
Halloween Candy (m/d)
Inside the Closet (m/d)

Theatre
Cactus Flower (a)
Camelot (a)
Child's Play (a)
Death of a Salesman (a)
The Fantastics (a)
The Lion In Winter (a)
Macbeth (a)
The Night Thoreau Spent In Jail (a)
Tom Savini's Dracula (a/m/d)
Stop The World (a)

Music Video
Twisted Sister - Be Cruel To Your School (d)

Books
Grande Illusions: The Art of Special Make-Up Effects
Grande Illusions II. A Learn By Example Guide

Special Skills
Federal License Explosives and Squibs
Fight Director/Society of British Fight Directors
Combat Photographer, Vietnam 1968-69
Tournament Fencer and Bullwhip Expert

Education
Carnegie Mellon University, Acting & Directing
Point Park College, Journalism
United States Army School of Photography



Savini's talent was evident from *Deathdream*, his first feature film.

thing I see within this frame really exists.' It was phenomenal, it was wonderful. But before that I didn't see anything but the guy at the keyboard.

Do you see that technology going into splatter?
Oh yeah, it will definitely take over.

But part of the particular fascination with splatter is that it looks so real.
That's right. Part of believing it to be real is the fact that three dimensionally it's there. With CGI, always in the back of your head you have to fight the fact that you know it's not there.

You're not working CGI I take it.
No.

When you worked on From Dusk Till Dawn, *was it Tarantino who called you or how did it happen?*
I got a call from a casting agent and I sent an audition tape and got the part. I couldn't believe it when I got it though – I thought it was a shot in the dark.

Did you have something to do with the effects?
No. There's a film coming out called *Full Tilt Boogie*. It's actually the making of *From Dusk Till Dawn*. In it I talk about going to a convention where a fan came up to me and said, 'listen, I work in a video store and I'm wondering if you'd like to come by and sign a few films and so on.' And I went by and it was Quentin Tarantino. That was years ago and he has hired me three times since. [*Killing Zoe*, *Mr. Snitch* and *From Dusk Till Dawn*]

Of all the films you've worked on, which have you been most satisfied with?
Probably *Day of the Dead*.

And how about least favourite? Is it still Maniac*?*
No, probably *The Ripper*. I always have to apologize for that one when people bring it up.

Are you active in the horror scene in terms of conventions and keeping up a public profile?
Absolutely. My phone number is listed, anybody can call me, I get e-mail all the time and I have a website with a chat room and the whole thing. I like to keep in contact with fans.

You've held the title of Wizard of Gore for a long time now. Looking back on your career, do you have any regrets?
Overall no, but there are some things I would do differently. I'd like to re-shoot all the effects for *Dawn of the Dead* because almost everything there could be done much better now! Seriously though, I have no regrets, it's been great and it's good to be famous for something. The fact that I've acted and done other stuff like stunt work has made me versatile, so hopefully people will remember me for all the things I've done, not just the gore.



One of the many now-classic scenes from *Martin*.



Fuad Ramses prepares the *Blood Feast*.

continued from pg. 11

strategy, elementary as it was, paid off in spades.

The crude, cheaply made *Blood Feast* recounts the madcap plottings of Fuad Ramses, an Egyptian caterer seeking to reanimate an Egyptian love goddess through a ritual blood feast. The plot falls to the wayside no thanks to an amateur script and laughable acting to go straight for the blood promised in the title. We witness, with little editorial restraint, as Ramses collects the grisly ingredients for his feast; cutting out a woman's tongue, hacking the leg off another and scooping the brains out of a young woman at the beach.

An Admonition:
IF YOU ARE THE PARENT OR THE GUARDIAN OF AN IMPRESSIONABLE ADOLESCENT — DO NOT BRING HIM OR PERMIT HIM TO SEE THIS MOTION-PICTURE

The film set the style and narrative logic of the Lewis films that followed, all of which featured ever gorier depictions of young women being chopped up and eviscerated in such over-the-top offerings as *Color Me Blood Red* (1964), *The Wizard of Gore* (1968) and *The Gore Gore Girls* (1971).

Though he would never duplicate the commercial success of *Blood Feast*, Lewis' legacy was instrumental in paving the way for later filmmakers like Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, Sean Cunningham and George Romero. As such, he remains the single most important factor to the rise of splatter cinema in the decades following.

Today, Lewis' films enjoy an active — if not very substantial — viewing audience. His films continue to generate wildly divergent responses, veering from cult adulation, intellectual curiosity to bitter hostility. Unlike Ed Wood's notorious cinematic efforts, however, Lewis' films are widely considered to fall into the "so bad it's good" category. The over the top gore, poor scripting, bad acting, absurdly fiendish characters and exaggerated score come together to produce campy, high-spirited exploitation films that are often as funny as they are gory. Interestingly, it is this critical element of camp that is absent from much of the splatter which followed in the '70s and '80s.

-Emma Anderson



Pitching a Tentacle: Why Deep Rising Wasn't So Shallow

Deep Rising
Starring Treat Williams, Famke Janssen and Anthony Heald
Written and directed by Stephen Sommers (debut)

Gaze into the abyss, won't you? Bear witness to the evolution of computer-generated Hollywood monsters over the lucky 13 month period between January 1997 and January 1998. *The Relic* (Jan. 97), *Anaconda* (Mar. 97), *The Lost World* (May 97), *Spawn* (Aug. 97), *Mimic* (Aug. 97); *Starship Troopers* (Nov. 97), *Alien Resurrection* (Nov. 97); *An American Werewolf In Paris* (Dec. 97), *Deep Rising* (Jan. 98). Focus on the above nine movies in terms of their computerised creature effects alone.

Now, I admit that the relic, the mimic, the alien and the werewolf did all require physical costuming in addition to computer programming, but for the purposes of this article consider the suits to be the dressing and the animation the meat (and yes, in some cases the turkey). Because today's topic, folks, is technology and 1997 was arguably the year the ptxel broke. Never before had we seen such expansive employment of computer-driven character creation, nor at such an affordable rate. Or frequency.

Think about it: no fewer than eight major monster movies from last year favoured electric dreaming over plastic surgery. Specific budgets are irrelevant anyhow, because *The Lost World* easily trounced the competition's combined expense accounts (and for my money, the *Starship Troopers* bugs created a bigger visual buzz than those jurassic park rangers).

Granted, the bulk of these nine nasty creatures deserved less to be associated with the cutting edge than the cutting floor (the only A's I gave *Anaconda* were the ones in its title), but what's truly interesting about examining the above list of movies strictly in terms of bells and whistles is that there's noticeable improvement from the first to the last. To put it simply: *The Relic*, *Anaconda*, *Spawn*, *Mimic*, *Alien* and *American Werewolf* all sputtered (and started, and



sputtered, etc.), but *Deep Rising* sailed pretty damn smoothly.

Forget about the fact that it was a sinkhole of a story (and a stinkhole of a script, as Finnegan, Treat Williams' most memorable lines were "What now?" *twice*, and just to throw us a curve, "Now what?" a little later). Instead, think of the octopo, or whatever you want to call those things with the hybrid hydra hugging equipment (tentacles, that is).

Here's the litmus test. What looked more realistic: the relic shimmying up to the museum skylight, the anaconda grabbing the trawler tramp from the waterfall, SPAWN DUKING IT OUT WITH THE VIOLATOR IN HADES?!? I could go on, but editing is as much a virtue in media as it is in movies: the point is that I offer *Deep Rising*'s octopo as a top notch example of blue screening sans blues.

Hell, I saw Carpenter's superb *The Thing* again last week, and the concluding sequence where the titular thingamajig burrowed beneath the floorboards and made them explode like falling dominoes was lame. But no matter how hard it was to swallow those fettucini-with-a-mind-of-its-own tentacles chasing Treat Williams and Famke "Legs of Steel" Janssen down those extra-long corridors in *Deep Rising*, don't tell me that it didn't look damn believable.

Friends, it's easy to bury *Deep Rising*, but I came to raise it. As standard Hollywood sci fi/horror action films go, it definitely deserved to sink with the doomed '97 armada. But evaluating it strictly as an FX fest, aficionados of the widescreen video generation should look upon it more as a sleeper. Less a case of awaking the giant than stirring the pot, perhaps, but a rousing experience nonetheless.

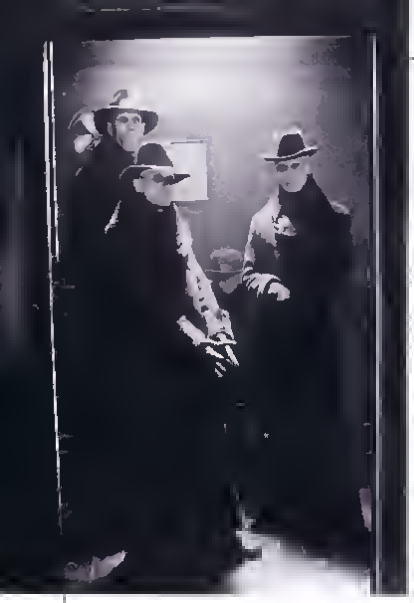
-Gary Butler

City Too Dark

Dark City
Starring Rufus Sewell, Kiefer Sutherland and Jennifer Connelly
Directed by Alex Proyas
Written by Alex Proyas, Lem Dobbs and David S. Goyer

Ah, the nineties, the decade that will be remembered for films with spectacular special effects and embarrassingly weak screenplays. Films like *The Lost World*, *Fifth Element* and *Dark City* will all, unfortunately and assuredly, fall into this category. Puzzling that in the case of *Dark City*, director Alex Proyas originally intended to create a sci-fi thriller with substance. In the accompanying press release he remarks, "In literature, science fiction has always been a genre for ideas that can alter your perspective on things, in film it's almost never used for that – it's used to have big spaceships blow up cities. I think we're a little tired of that."

Still, Proyas could not help himself. While the dark city sleeps, buildings crumble to the ground seemingly without explanation, and the plot falls along with it. It is strange to think that the director abandoned what might have been a highly original reworking of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to create



another Batman city with an overly dramatic soundtrack.

In the story, John Murdoch (Rufus Sewell) awakes one morning to discover he is the main suspect in a series of brutal murders. While trying to avoid capture by Detective Bumstead (William Hurt), Murdoch attempts to piece together conflicting memories from his past. Things just don't make sense, and the sun never comes up. As the nights pass, he discovers that the city is an alien science experiment in macrocosm and that he is the only human resistant to the aliens' power to stop time. For some unknown reason, the aliens (or Strangers as they are here called), alter the memories of the citizens on a regular basis through a process called Tuning.

Time stops while the Strangers fiddle with people's memories and relationships, wives become ex-wives and the landscape of the city is changed accordingly to suit new circumstances (the reason behind the crumbling buildings). In the end, Murdoch somehow triumphs and succeeds in creating a world where the sun rises and sets as it should.

Why all this happens is never explained, but it sure looks amazing when it does. Which means that *Dark City* could have been great if the writers — besides Proyas they include Lem Dobbs (*Kafka*) and David Goyer (*Blade*) — had developed some motive for the Strangers' actions, as well as a reason for Murdoch's ability to resist their powers of hypnosis. But unfortunately, they fell in love with the atmosphere of it all and forgot about that essential little moviemaking element: coherence.

-Mary-Beth Hollyer

No Future in Second Prophecy

The Prophecy II
Starring Christopher Walken and Jennifer Beales
Directed by Greg Spence
Written by Mathew Greenberg & Greg Spence

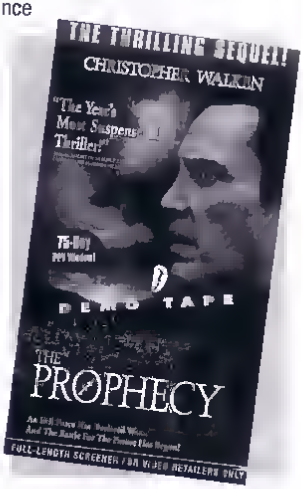
When a film does exceedingly well at the theatres, you can bet your box-office dollar that there will be a sequel in the making. More often than not the film's attempt to resurrect the past ends up raking in less profit than the original. At other times its receipt value is so dismal that its run at the theatres is reduced to a minimum.

Like the struggle for survival that dominates the food chain, film sequels rank according to their productivity and ability to survive. Some pictures, like *Scream 2*, do as well if not better than the original. Others, like *Speed 2*, go down like a sinking ship. Then there are those sequels that do not merit screen time altogether (let us call them the amoeba of the film industry), these are the films that are released straight to video.

The Prophecy II, directed by Greg Spence, falls into the latter category with good reason. Like its predecessor, the film begins with a voice-over narrative describing the war that occurred in Heaven when the fallen angels attempted to rise up against the Almighty. The consequences of this clash motivates the action of the plot in the sequel, pitting the "good" angels against the "bad" in a somewhat raunchy gang brawl along the San Fernando Valley. Not surprisingly, the war for territorial domination in Heaven compels Gabriel (Christopher Walken) to come back from the depths of the underground to the earth's surface. This time around, Gabriel seeks revenge on an unborn Nephilim (a child born of an angel and a human female).

The Prophecy's one and only attempt at startling the audience comes at the opening sequence when a man falls out of nowhere and smashes against the front window of a car being driven by Valerie (Jennifer Beales). That's our introduction to the film's main characters, as the man who is hit (Daniel) becomes the proto-typical figure of the man who saves the day. Valerie is the helpless figure who requires the aid of a strong male to set things straight. Like any predictable Hollywood horror film, the pair get together under false pretences and their one sexual encounter leaves Valerie impregnated. Naturally, the child she carries is what Gabriel seeks to destroy, and Daniel and Valerie have no choice but to duke it out with the evil arch-angel.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that *The Prophecy II* by-passed the theatres. The film



is a carbon copy of the original except that it showcases a cast of less admirable actors (other than Walken, who is forced to carry the entire film). The director makes no effort for originality and relies on humdrum attempts at horror scenes which leave you hoping Satan will tear the earth open and swallow these characters whole.

Nevertheless, the sequel — as sequels go — does get its good marks. Christopher Walken's kitschy one-liners are comical, the cinematography is impressive and the editing effective. But even with this, *The Prophecy II* does not preserve its sense of adventure the second time around, falling short on creative merit and succumbing to the end of the movie chain.

-Dina Nikolis

British Classic Rises From the Pit

Quatermass and the Pit
Starring James Donald, Andrew Keir and Barbara Shelley
Directed by Roy Ward Baker
Written by Nigel Kneale

The name Bernard Quatermass probably doesn't ring too strong a bell with many people in this X-cessive day and age. Pity, for Professor Quatermass, who saved the world on at least four occasions, was instrumental in the world of science fiction and horror — not only in Britain but worldwide.

When *The Quatermass Experiment* debuted in a six part serial on BBC television back in 1953 it quickly became the first popularly accepted sci-fi production in Britain. Written by Nigel Kneale, the story introduced professor Quatermass (played by Ronald Tate), member of the British Experimental Rocket Group, and detailed his attempts to save his planet from a hidden space menace. The series was to have a huge influence on future British television, paving the way for the successful *Pathfinders To* series and *Doctor Who*.

No surprise then, when another adventure materialized in 1955. The rather mundanely titled *Quatermass II* was also written by Kneale but this time starred John Robinson as the eponymous hero. Equally as popular as its predecessor, the rights to both serials were soon purchased by then-new studio Hammer Films, which promptly converted them into big screen adventures, *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1956) and *Quatermass II* (1957), or as they were known in the US, *The Creeping Unknown* and *Enemy From Space*, respectively.

Both movies were directed by Val Guest, adapted by Kneale, and starred American actor Brian Donlevy in the lead. They were enormous hits around the world and not only began Hammer's long, illustrious career but are also credited with launching a new and more sophisticated wave of science fiction and horror films.

A third television serial, *Quatermass and the Pit* was transmitted in 1958. Starring André Morrell, the story continued the series' success and is widely regarded to be the best of the three. It wasn't long before Hammer optioned the screenplay, but their attempts to turn it into a film immediately hit a snag when US co-financing proved difficult to attain. It wouldn't be until 1966 that production began, with the finished film *Quatermass and the Pit* surfacing in 1967 (*Five Million Years to Earth* in the US).

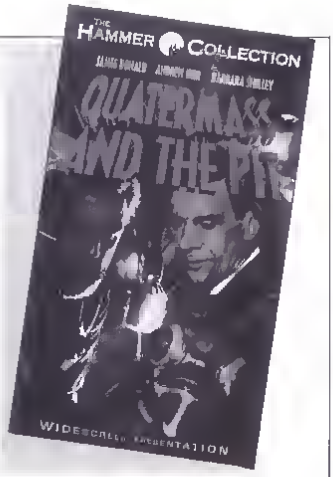
By coincidence, the film's journey to video has also been relatively long (the two previous films have been available for a number of years). Issued recently by Anchor Bay, this beautifully remastered and widescreen edition more than makes up for the wait.

In the story, workers excavating a new subway extension come across a number of odd skeletal remains. Further digging reveals what appears to be a missile, but is in fact a rocket of some kind. The strange reports of poltergeists in the surrounding area and the discovery of a hidden, and inhabited, compartment in the ship, lead Quatermass to some rather nasty conclusions. As usual, bureaucrats refuse to listen, and chaos ensues before the film's end.

An excellent screenplay (again by Kneale), expert direction by Roy Ward Baker (*Asylum*, *Scars of Dracula*) and a great cast make this an above average Hammer entry. Professor Quatermass is played this time by Andrew Keir (Kneale having detested Donlevy's interpretation) and presents the character in a much more approachable and less abrasive manner than his predecessor. He is ably supported by James Donald as sympathetic paleontologist Roney, Hammer stalwart Barbara Shelley as his assistant Barbara, and Julian Glover as Colonel Breen, the sceptical army officer who believes Quatermass is full of hooey.

Despite its low budget, the film manages to impress with its production, especially during the catastrophic climax. The only real disappointment are the aliens themselves, but as their appearance is kept to a minimum, this does not detract from the film's overall effect. The gore is also kept to a minimum yet there are still plenty of effective chills, most notably, again, the end scenes of mobs running rampant in London streets.

Although a critical and commercial success, the movie's more daring and novel



theme of humankind's evolution being manipulated by aliens would soon be overshadowed by more elaborate and complex films such as the following year's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *Quatermass and the Pit* was soon forgotten, but it would be twelve years before the fourth and final Quatermass serial was aired on television and the character finally faded into obscurity.

There have been rumours over the past couple of years of a Hammer revival with a new Quatermass film as its spearhead, but unfortunately nothing has been made as of yet. Hopefully this will soon be rectified, as one of the founding fathers of sci-fi/horror entertainment deserves better than to wallow away in the memories of a select few.

-Pedro Cabezuelo

Continent Loses to the Competition

The Lost Continent
Starring Eric Porter, Hildegard Knef and Suzanna Leigh
Directed by Michael Carreras
Written under a pseudonym by Michael Carreras
Based on the novel "Uncharted Seas" by Dennis Wheatley

In a desperate attempt to diversify, faced with both a tired roster and a declining reputation, the Hammer House of Horror offered up a Columbia Pictures-style sea epic as its flagship release in 1968. The cinematic previews for *The Lost Continent* claimed that the film was an adventure so big that only the big screen can do it justice - or perhaps the wide screen, considering that the film was recently re-released in deluxe home

continued on pg 19

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The Beautiful Grotesqueries of Floria Sigismondi



by Rod Gudino

Most people credit Marilyn Manson for the images he perpetrates through his music videos. After all, it's logical to suppose that the grotesque fantasies which comprise said videos would come from the same individual who practices public self-mutilation. But behind Manson's video facade stands one Floria Sigismondi, a Hamilton, Ontario-raised fashion photographer, videographer and unlikely dark architect of MTV's new death chic.

Sigismondi, whose visual style combines the dark artistry of David Lynch and the nightmare oppressiveness of the Quay Brothers, has become a sought after commodity by artists in search of an edge in the hyper visual VR of music video. She has been asked to apply her brooding cinematic vision to the music of David Bowie, The Crystal Method, Filter, Tricky and even Sarah McLachlan. Sigismondi has since become a celebrity within the music industry and within the wider world of cinema as well, the latter which has of late adopted the habit of fiercely petitioning her with feature film scripts.

Born in Pesca, Italy in 1965 and named after a character in the opera Tosca, Sigismondi graduated with degrees in painting and photography from the Ontario College of Art. Shortly thereafter she wound up making music videos which she says provided her the ideal platform to explore interests in fashion and photography. Relatively early in her career as a videographer she received what would turn out to be her big break, she was hired to work on two Marilyn Manson videos — for "The Beautiful People" and "Tourniquette" — and given free artistic license.

Sigismondi's signature style, which she had been struggling to develop with early video work, became immediately tangible in the resulting videos. "The Beautiful People" envisions a Dante-esque fantasy where a demonic dictator-like-figure (Manson) lords over an Inferno of human mannequins. "Tourniquette", which Sigismondi refers to as "a warped Romeo & Juliet love story," tells the tale of a woman-mannequin trapped in a box and kept alive by her captor (you guessed it) who feeds her a steady diet of his skin, hair and fingernails.

"It was the first outlet I was able to push things as far as I did," Sigismondi told *Rue Morgue*. "Before that there were always restraints, either budgetary or in terms of what the band could get away with. Marilyn was open to a lot of things and we just connected off the top so I was able to push it much further. It was like a release for me from holding back for so long."

Interestingly, Sigismondi claims that her videos were not made with the aim of frightening or repulsing audiences but, in fact, with the aim of achieving the opposite effect. Employing a terminology reminiscent of Manson's own, she defends her use of the grotesque on the grounds that it imparts its own highly attractive aesthetic.

"I believe a lot of grotesque things are beautiful," she says. "The images in my videos, they're beautiful to me, I don't see anything grotesque in them. I don't believe something is beautiful just because the media puts it out as being beautiful. Actually, I find what people call abnormal to be beautiful."

Her ideas, she says, originate out of an active dream life, not from nightmares or from the psychological residue of past experiences. Insisting that the images in her videos simply represent an unpopular aesthetic, Sigismondi is reticent to view herself as working within the body of horror cinema, even if her theatrical, gothic signature style owes significantly to the tradition.

"I don't watch horror films and I don't particularly enjoy watching them," she says. "I tend to go places maybe where not a lot of people go and I like it there, a lot of my images come from there. I'm in love with those kinds of images, I don't know why I'm attracted to them, it's something I can't really explain."



Sigismondi and Manson on set of "The Beautiful People."

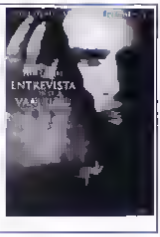


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Nostalgic Narratives: New Genre Fiction Looks to the Past

The Martyring
Thomas Sullivan
Forge Books

With *The Martyring*, Thomas Sullivan captures a certain nostalgia about the gothic novel tradition, images of flying buttresses, pointed arches, eccentric characters and a perverse plot that reveals itself as carefully as Emily unveils herself at her father's funeral in Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. Through the resurrection of these late eighteenth century gothic ideals, Sullivan manages to make his nightmarish mystery story spook like a modern horror pulp.

In the novel, Kurt Nehmer's subconscious obsession to belong to the Hauptmann dynasty (or legacy as he soon finds out), leads him from the sanctity of his life in Germany to Marlo County, Florida. His obsession slowly becomes a reality as he goes to great lengths to become one of the Hauptmann, who for generations have been skilled artisans in creating stained glass windows from the Dark Ages. But from the moment that Kurt enters the family home, evil begins to darken his new surroundings.

The death of his Uncle Martin requires that a new family member reside over the craft, and in steps Detlef Brenemann Hauptmann to replace his dead brother as the head of the studio. His arrival to Marlo County is accompanied by a slew of unconventional murders which hark back to an archaic time when martyrs who practised the Christian faith were killed in a series of bizarre and grisly techniques. In intimate detail, Sullivan describes crucifixions, decapitations, and scenes of people speared to death and boiled in tar that come to plague the county, and milks a lot of choice goosed-flesh moments out of it.

Enter a cynical, hard-line cop by the name of Jack Skelote, who takes an interest in the unusual nature of the murders and begins to put the pieces together. True to the goth narrative style, Kurt also takes on an investigation of his own and soon uncovers a family history that has been built on secrets handed down through generations.

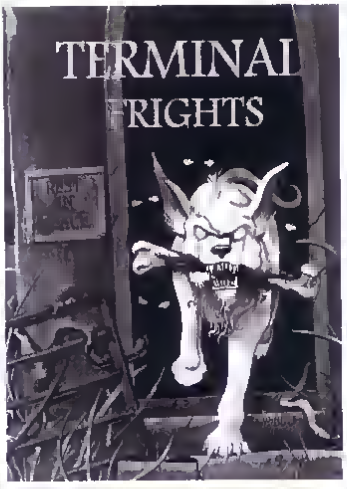
Sullivan's *The Martyring* is a fine story that employs all the classic gothic elements to create atmosphere and tension and consistently maintain it. The dark castle enchants the characters with its haunting past and its labyrinth of passages and latched doors, a fine stage for the unveiling of spooky plot points. Sullivan also displays an eye for the horrific and pays homage to some of the greatest horror authors of the eighteenth century with his emphasis on a murder story that explores the fragility of the human mind. He shows adeptness at maintaining the readers' attention and the foresight not to disappoint with a less than admirable conclusion. Highly recommended spine-chilling entertainment.

-Dina Nikolis

Terminal Frights
Ken Abner, ed.
Terminal Frights Press

Except for a brief period in the 70s and 80s when the major publishers were all frantically searching for the next Stephen King, the literary marketplace has generally recognized the fringe nature of horror fiction. With just enough horror film aficionados to make movies lucrative, but only a fraction of that audience reading in the genre, it quickly became evident that there weren't enough horror readers to go around. Where once they had each published half a dozen new horror titles a month, the major publishers decided almost simultaneously to ditch their horror imprints, leaving the meagre pickings to whatever small publisher had the nerve to try their hand in a field where even most of the marketing network had vanished.









The original Terminal Fright magazine, now publishing house for horror fiction

All of this served to shrink the horror audience to a few thousand diehard lovers of the gross out — plus a few dozen goth communities, and a couple of million people who liked to read the odd vampire book. Then *Scream* and *Scream 2* came along and reminded the world how much fun horror could be.

Terminal Frights does the same with the printed word. If more blood than a Countess Bathory pool party is your idea of a good time, you may not like this new anthology, but if you're one of the people who is pleased at the increasing marginalization of splatterpunk and its perverse descendants, chances are you'll have a great time reading this book. In a way, the garish cartoony cover is appropriate to a publication that seeks to put the fun back into reading horror. Every story here manages to be entertaining, without being stupid or glib. A number of them leave strong enough impressions to recall vividly days later.

The stories come in a wide variety of styles, from virtually every era of horror. Much homage is paid to the masters of the past, and in fact, H.P. Lovecraft and Bram Stoker even turn up as characters in two of these stories. You'll also find ghosts, werewolves, a bushel of serial killers and even a heartwarming tale about coming to terms with death. As much as you may have encountered variations of these stories before, even the least of them are absorbing reads that will provide some satisfying jolts, smiles and shudders.

Despite the book's fondness for the tried and true, the most effective stories are still the ones with new ideas and a modern sensibility. Among the best are the frenetic and entertaining

"The Lower Deep" by rising horror star Tom Piccirilli, Brian McNaughton's nasty and funny "The Man Who Ignored the FBI Warning" the riveting and raunchy detective/were-beast story "La Belle Dame Sans Regrets" by Brian Hopkins and David Niall Wilson, Michael Arnzen's creepy "Stigmata", and Scott Urban's fascinating "Edge-Run" into Clive Barker territory.

While not as ground-breaking as *The Throne of Bones* by Brian McNaughton — the first book published by TF publishing — the *Terminal Frights* anthology offers up a solid assortment of stories. Ken Abner has hinted at a possible series, depending on the success of this book, he just has to unearth a few thousand more readers who remember and appreciate how much fun horror can be. A tasty treat indeed.

-Dale L. Sproule

Mind Kill

Richard La Plante

Forge Books

We remember fondly when the new wave of horror meant splatterpunk: visceral and uncompromising in its brutality as it was, at least it was well written. And maybe we deserve to be picky about that one aspect of the printed word. After all, writing is a technique as much as an art, which means that even if your story sucks, you should at least go down with the satisfaction of having fought the good fight. That fight, as any warrior who braves the battlefield of the blank 8 1/2 X 11, has to do with at least trying to emulate good writing.

But enough by way of introduction. Splatterpunk is history and the new vogue (new once again) is a literary hybrid called the Thriller. This unique creature enjoys the commercial advantage of appealing to several markets at once, be it horror, suspense, action or generic fiction. As such, it seldom strays too far into any camp: its primary goal to be realized as a feature film, genre unimportant. Such is the case with *Mind Kill*, the new novel from martial-arts writer Richard la Plante. It is, to put it simply, an awful book, replete with a juvenile plot, numbskulled spirituality and very bad writing.

The story treats of a charismatic cult leader named Justin Gabriel who has enchanted the very jailers who oversee his cell with the notion that he is the second coming of Hannibal Lecter. Gabriel has perfected the ability to travel through dreams, you see, an item that reeks of martial artistry, myth-making and tried supernatural psychology. But we digress. Gabriel dreamwalks into the minds of his oppressors, the Judge, the members of the jury and of course, Bill Fogarty, the cop who busted him in the first place and put him away for life.

As the narrative winds on its steady downward spiral, Fogarty must find a new spiritual path with which to do battle with Gabriel, before the latter's torments cause him to lose his sanity. The clincher: we find all of this out in the first ten pages — motives, motivations and even the causal effects of the bogus spirituality practised by Gabriel — it's all laid out like a neat little line of dominos. And nothing new ever comes afterwards, it's pretty much a matter of kicking over the first domino and away we go to dreamland to be dragged through twenty-six chapters of the inevitable.

A writer like La Plante, who obviously has little idea about anything pertaining to narrative restraint (ie. character development, suspense or mystery) nevertheless has a market cut out for his writing. It belongs to those people who like to read novelizations of their favourite blockbuster films, for them, going through the motions must be great entertainment indeed. But not for me.

-Emma Anderson



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video format with packaging that screams UNDISCOVERED GEM.

Uninspired junk is more like it. Captain's log, nonsensical. I should have known better than to try to make the kessel run in a congenitally sinking ship stuffed to the gills with rebellious sailors, fishy passengers and sub-atomic explosives - did I mention the part about going so out of my way to ignore the hurricane warning that I headed RIGHT INTO THE HURRICANE? Then again, someone had to lead us down the garden path if we were going to see some monsters, and its not my fault that the scariest beasties in that aforementioned garden were gigantic killer weeds. Yes, folks, killer weeds - also promised in *The Lost Continent*'s cinematic previews, all three of which are appended in this special edition.

The evil kelp is boa-constrictive by nature,



and tends to prefer portholes as points of ingress. As for its effectiveness you'll get the idea if you isolate an extra-long tentacle from the octopus in Ed Wood's *Bride of the Monster* and replace Bela Lugosi with a voluptuous vamp (not to be confused with the traditional Hammer big breasted babe - she comes later). Any overview of *The Lost Continent* invariably paints a picture of high camp, even suggests the possibility of an A+ B-Movie. Indeed, all of the elements are there: ridiculous excuses for plot, characters and special effects (especially) abound throughout. But the idiotic plot in question drags, it takes the better part of an hour for the HMS Corita to become bogged down in kelptomania, which hour includes a fifteen minute ship-abandonment/liteboat sequence that only brings the survivors back to the Corita!

The idiotic characters bore a Tom Waits-ish drunk sobers up overnight at the height of the crisis, trading in slightly witty lines for very wimpy heroics. As for the special effects, they are charmlessly bad and obviously cheap. SCTV's Zontar cabbage looked better than the piteous weed-stuff chomping at the heart of this continental drift. But these are minor criticisms in the face of what really damages *The Lost Continent*'s credibility as a cult classic, which is its undeniable - and uninventive - plundering of the accidental style of the type of movie in question.

The Lost Continent was clearly designed to cash in on the success of *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, *The Three Worlds of Gulliver*, *Mysterious Island* and *Jason and the Argonauts*, four relatively closely filmed Columbia Pictures adventures (the first released in 1958, the last 1963) driven by strong characters and innovative special effects. The fact that Hammer had half a decade at its disposal to try to improve the Columbia formula - and failed to the point of de-evolution - only betrays the shallow thinking at the heart of this watered-down project all the more. With the exception of an orchestral leitmotif for the monsters (superior to *Friday the 13th*'s Jason theme) three decent Hammer-style deaths (all of which precede the lost continent portion of the movie!) and -- for depraved Hammerheads only -- the aforementioned female with the bust from heaven in the middle of all that hell (Dana Gillespie), there is nothing to recommend this video to any self-respecting channel surfer.

In the face of clunky crustaceans and awkward octopi that make Barney look frighteningly real by comparison, whichever minutes of film footage were restored for this special edition likely could have been left on the floor of the big room without affecting the end result. *The Lost Continent* is ultimately as soulless as Ahab - and as boring as actually reading *Moby Dick*. Worst of all, stacked beside its obvious source of inspiration, *Mysterious Island* (released six years previous), it's clearly 20,000 frames out of its league as well.

-Gary Butler

Definitive Dracula from Hammer

Dracula: Prince of Darkness
Starring Christopher Lee and Barbara Shelley
Directed by Terence Fisher
Written by John Sansom

The success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) made Hammer a major force in the horror film genre, and it wasn't long before the studio turned its attention to vampire lore. *Horror of Dracula* (1958) reunited Frankenstein's leading men, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee as Dr. Van Helsing and Dracula respectively. The reintroduction of Bram Stoker's greatest creation proved immensely popular. Unfortunately, Lee chose to temporarily hang up his cloak immediately afterwards, fearing typecasting and, despite a brief and disappointing foray in 1960 (*The Brides of Dracula*), it would take Hammer seven years to deliver a proper sequel, *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*.

Released on video recently for the first time, *Prince of Darkness* is presented in its original theatrical ratio, which makes an already excellent film more enticing, even though the story is rather mundane. While vacationing in the Carpathian Mountains, two couples find themselves near the foreboding Castle Dracula. Ignoring several warnings by local peasants to stay away, they accept the invitation of the castle's lone inhabitant, Klove, a rather macabre manservant. It's been a few years since the Count disintegrated into a pile of ashes (the climax of the first film), but luckily for horror fans

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Dali'e bi[illegible] painting *Face of War.*

Art of Darkness

The Development of Horror in Western Art

by Dan Zachariah

War, disease, corruption, alienation — no, we're not talking about the newest line of thrillers hitting the box office in the new year, but about the history of Western art. Traditionally downplayed and almost always buried against a socio-historical milieu, the legacy of horror in fine art has nevertheless created a miasma of extraordinary images that have cast a cold shadow across the ages. Herewith we present a capsulized overview of some of the key figures and works which impacted and developed the genre as it came into maturity in the twentieth century.

Hieronymus Bosch

During Bosch's time, the average life span was relatively short and as a result, there was a strong societal emphasis on the afterlife and salvation. Religious upheaval and turbulence helped to solidify religious dogma, which was played out against the general fear of damnation in hell, then central to Christianity. This idea in particular finds an extreme form of expression in the work of Bosch, who was able to exploit and play upon the unseen perils envisioned by his society.

The right-hand panel of Bosch's three-paneled composition brilliantly captures the infinite despair and agony associated with damnation. While other painters of the time concentrated on positive representations of the Christian faith, Bosch delighted in showing what would happen if we chose to follow the way of Satan rather than God. *The Garden of Delights* tells a story of how the hapless legions of the damned are marshalled into groups by the devil's assistants, who submit them to enslavement and merciless torture for eternity. The most unforgettable image in this picture is that of Lucifer as a giant hybrid of insect and rodent, sitting on his throne, devouring a body like a snake devours its prey. Through his work, Bosch helped set the standard for representations of gruesome fantasy that can be traced to the present day, notably the horror films of Clive Barker and Alex Proyas.

Francisco de Goya

About the time Goya produced his infamous prints in the late 1700s, horror became an integral element of artistic expression. In all of his prints, we are presented with the acts of violence as they are happening or the gore of their immediate aftermath. No other artist at this point had come close to matching Goya's ability to render bloodshed with such visceral detail and shocking candour. Which is why his approach destroyed any sense of security that existed within the complacent high-art establishment, which still adhered to conservative notions of subject matter.

One composition depicts a man impaled by the sharp branches of a tree. Dismemberments and atrocities committed against the human body are common subjects in his art. We should not be too surprised by the appearance of Goya's imagery at this time. With the rise of Napoleon, the seeds of modern warfare — with its accompanying mass-carnage — had been sown. Societies were developing new technologies, and with them, new methods of killing the enemy. It was only on the blood-strewn battlefields that the uniquely destructive powers of these weapons could be revealed in all their grisly glory.

Goya's vision was not limited to simply representing atrocities, however; through the use of powerful contrasts between light and dark he succeeded in imparting a nightmarish, surreal quality to his sparse landscapes. His prints are more than representations of the realities of war; they unveil man's worst instincts in the face of brutal aggression where rules of civility and honour are cast away. In this way, the talented Spaniard almost single-handedly laid down the foundations of surrealism and expressionism with 82 prints from his *Disasters of War* series.

James Ensor

In the final two decades of the 19th century, Symbolism became the artistic yardstick by which all other painting was measured. The Symbolists wanted to represent their feelings and emotions in allegorical terms but without explicit reference to the ideas that provoked them. Two Symbolists in particular were adept at composing images that were representative of society's ills during the turn of the century era.

The Belgian painter James Ensor became famous for his "mask" paintings in which characters were depicted wearing phantasmagorical masks meant to symbolize the evil inherent in "civilized" men and women. These masks, with their sickening grimaces and exaggerated features, are often interpreted as depictions of the dark side of human nature, worked out within a highly subjective, open-ended framework.



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Edvard Munch

This rather unnerving work symbolizes his revulsion at the systematic destruction of the environment and civil standards through relentless technological advances and modern warfare. Munch's intuitive powers were able to apprehend the supposedly beneficial developments in politics and science for what they really were. Indeed, *The Scream* has been interpreted by some as a prophecy of the horrors that befell the twentieth century. Needless to say that some of the greatest proto-horror works of the early twentieth century — most notably the paintings of the German Expressionists and Picasso's *Guernica* — were greatly influenced by Munch's benchmark canvas.



Ensor's savage symbolism exposed the sickening innards of human society.

Salvador Dali

Salvador Dali was the surrealist movement's most popular and controversial figure, and his quirky, erratic, and sometimes violent personality was placed at the service of artistic innovation in Europe. Dali seemed to believe that terror and ugliness were central to the working of the unconscious mind. Be that as it may, his paintings were beautiful in their ability to "materialize images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialist fury of precision" (as he once put it).

Soft Construction with Boiled Beans - Premonition of Civil War (1936) typifies the kind of grotesque distortions of the human body that Dali delighted in rendering. Gnarled clumps of flesh consisting of jumbled limbs and appendages are set against an expansive and desolate landscape where a cabinet and some lima beans are strewn about. These bizarre juxtapositions and contexts came to typify Dali's work, and singled him out as an artist with one of the most fertile — and disturbing — imaginations of the century.

Another startling work is *The Face of War* (1941), which must be acknowledged as one of the finest expressions of psychological horror, if only for its sheer academic refinement. A tortured head resembling a half-eaten corpse with other faces peering out from the eye-sockets and mouth is endowed with enormous scale to enhance the all-too explicit outrage and terror the artist was trying to convey. Here, Dali's genius in opting to bring brazen shock tactics to the forefront of contemporary art foreshadowed similar later developments in horror cinema.

Francis Bacon

It is only fitting that the post-war period saw such a prodigious output of art incorporating themes of horror. The mass-death that global war engendered was certainly a factor as was the rise of urban crime and social alienation, all of which facilitated a sort of cynical collective psychology. Of all the painters to emerge at the end of WWII, Francis Bacon was the most effective at shocking an audience. He exploded onto the scene with his triptych, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944) which depicted what can best be described as a monstrous, oversized weasel with a ferocious temper. Like so many of his works, this one reflected the primal rage which was in evidence in global scale.

Similarly, *Painting* from 1946, shows a decaying, decrepit man sitting alone in front of a glass table with a massive slab of beef hanging just behind him, what came to signify the essence and substance of death. *Study After Velazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) presents us with a very disquieting image of a screaming pope seated in a golden chair with rails. The background is rendered in black with overabundant vertical brush-strokes of light colour that lend a nightmarish quality to the image.

Apparently, Bacon gleaned some of his ideas from medical books on mouth diseases, which is why gaping holes with wrinkled, festering features substitute for the human mouth in his paintings. His fascination with death was an omnipresent theme and the "smell of death" wafted from his canvases as if from an abattoir.



A distquieting rendering of the Pope, after Bacon.



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Classic Cut

THEM!

(1954, USA)
Starring James Whitmore, Edmund Gwenn, James Arness.
Directed by Gordon Douglas
Written by Russell S Hughes and Ted Sherdeman.
Based on a story by George Worthing Yates

Hollywood has been - and always will be - peopled by trend junkies, those vampirish movie execs who feed off the creativity of others The trend junkie sees a particular film raking it in at the box office and greenlights similarly-themed projects in the hope of "tapping into the same demographic" (or whatever catch phrase the marketing department is using this month). The pictures which follow are invariably lacklustre and fail to live up to the trend junkie's box office expectations, but no one learns anything and a new "genre" is born - for better or worse.



Noir atmosphere and taut script-writing continues to single Them! out from the horror sub-genre the film spawned.

Take Quentin Tarantino The critical and (more importantly) financial success of *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs* spawned dozens of smart-assed/graphically violent films for which the word 'Tarantino-esque' was created *Two Days In The Valley? Killing Zoe?*

This one fact is inescapable movies which strike a nerve in the general populace will be copied ad infinitum Call it *Invasion Of The Hollywood Accountant Zombies*. Which brings us to *Them!*, the first -- and arguably the best -- of a slew of radioactivity-enlarged creature features which kept hyperactive school children entertained during lazy Saturday afternoon matinees down at the Bijou during the late 50s and early '60s

Released in 1954, nine years after the American government dropped Fat Man and Little Boy on the already defeated Japanese nation, *Them!* remains a tautly-written thriller, as well as a sci-fi/horror classic

The movie opens on a police plane circling the Nevada desert. The authorities are on the lookout for the Ellisons, a vacationing FBI man's family, which has been reported missing. Patrolmen on the ground find the youngest daughter (Sandy Descher) wandering the desert, seemingly in shock. The cops find the Ellison camp ripped apart but nothing taken, forensic experts called to the scene find strange animal-like tracks around the campsite and hear a spooky, high-pitched chirruping, dismissed by the authorities as the sounds of the desert

More killings and more mysterious tracks bring the case to the attention of FBI agent Robert Graham (James Arness). He calls on the father-daughter duo of Drs Harold and Patricia Medford (played by Edmund Gwenn and Joan Weldon, respectively) to identify the strange markings A further investigation of the Ellison site by the Medfords, Graham, and Sergeant Ben Peterson (James Whitmore) confirms the senior Dr Medford's suspicions when his daughter is suddenly attacked by a giant ant, which Peterson and Graham barely manage to kill

The old professor explains that the first atom bomb tests occurred just miles away at White Sands, and these ants are genetic mutations from those blasts Quick to take the offensive, Medford and Graham call in the army, with whose help they destroy the giant nest via cyanide But too late Two queens and their consorts have escaped. One nest is discovered aboard a ship at sea and destroyed, but the second isn't found until months later when a giant sugar theft, and a hunch on Graham's part, lead authorities to the sewers beneath Los Angeles A final deadly battle is waged with the mutated spawn of Man's dangerous new toy: the atom bomb

If you want proof of the film's influence on subsequent filmmakers, compare the sequence where Joan Weldon, Arness and Whitmore enter the queen's chamber of the decimated ant colony and use flamethrowers to burn the unhatched eggs with the scene in James Cameron's *Aliens*, where Ripley and Newt enter the queen's chamber and Ripley um, burns the unhatched eggs with flamethrowers And let's not forget the summer of '98's first big money spectacle, the remade *Godzilla*, one of the higher profile giant monster movies which followed *Them!*

What distinguishes *Them!* from the B-grade monster shows which followed it is the noirish atmosphere created by both Russell S. Hughes' and Ted Sherdeman's efficient script, which effectively casts the giant ants as killers on the run As well, director of photography Sidney Hickox's masterful use of shadow and light (an ability he demonstrated eight years earlier as DOP on the noir classic *The Big Sleep*) adds to this mood The scene where Peterson and Trooper Ed Blackburn (Chris Drake) discover the dead body of one of the ants' early victims in the cellar of a decimated grocery store, followed closely by Blackburn's off-screen death, is as eerie and frightening as any scene ever captured on film

What followed the release of *Them!* was a series of movies dealing with the what-ifs created by that first atom bomb, many of these films were scripted by George Worthing Yates (one of *Them!*'s co-writers) Giant monsters created by radiation never seemed so scary and real as they did in *Them!* but this film never preaches never puts a foot - let alone a hairy appendage - into its mouth Instead, in a horrifying and entertaining way, it shows us the folly of humankind and the possible consequences of dealing with powers not fully under control The Oscar-nominated effects work incredibly well to convey this idea, and Steve "Spazz" Williams would be hard-pressed to improve upon the giant ants, even today

With the release of Emmerich and Devlin's *Godzilla*, a new(ish) generation of CGI creatures is no doubt on its way Giant insects are already back (*Starship Troopers*, *Mimic*). Can Rodan and Mothra redux be far behind? I can hear the trend junkies hitting their speed dials right now

-Sean Plummer



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worldwide, Klove managed to gather them all up. Thanks to a generous albeit unwilling blood donation by one of the holidaying men, Dracula soon lives again.

It's a good forty-five minutes into the film before Lee makes his first appearance, but the wait is well worth it. Not wasting any time, Dracula quickly transforms one of the females (Barbara Shelley) into his acolyte, and soon turns his attention to the other (Suzan Farmer). The rest of the film involves the surviving male's (Francis Matthews) attempts to save his wife, and with the aid of a vampire hunting monk (played by Quatermass' Andrew Keir), destroy Dracula once and for all.

Director Terence Fisher has been called Hammer's finest director and this film shows why. Even if the story itself is nothing special, the direction and performances are top-notch. Atmosphere is omnipresent, the first half of the film is a great example in its leisurely, but never boring, setting up of events. Dracula's resurrection is riveting and Fisher's use of shadows and light when Lee is on screen is highly effective.

The supporting cast is competent but two performances stand out. Keir's Father Sandor is a perfect replacement for the void left by Cushing, and Shelley is superb as the prim and proper (and dull) Helen, who is transformed into the evil and sensual servant of Dracula.

And, of course, there's Lee. This film established him as the best film Dracula ever. With even less dialogue than his first outing (actually, he has no dialogue), he's the perfect personification of evil, emerging silent out of darkness, with only the occasional angry hiss. Forget modern attempts to humanize the Lord of the Vampires. Lee portrays the Count as he was meant to be: fast, unpredictable and completely terrifying.

Lee would go on to play Dracula five more times for Hammer and several times for various European studios, his fears of typecasting way behind him. But this film catches him at his prime and is *the* definitive performance.

-Pedro Cabezuelo




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